



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 27 APR 2022



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	04/26 New omicron mutant: BA.2.12.1?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-new-york-united-states-05a6c872b4f3fcb1dc52125962bce604
GIST	What do we know about the new omicron mutant?

	<p>It's a descendant of the earlier super-contagious "stealth omicron" and has quickly gained ground in the United States.</p> <p>BA.2.12.1 was responsible for 29% of new COVID-19 infections nationally last week, according to data reported Tuesday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And it caused 58% of reported infections in the New York region.</p> <p>The variant has been detected in at least 13 other countries, but the U.S. has the highest levels of it so far. Scientists say it spreads even faster than stealth omicron.</p> <p>Cases are rising in places with increasing levels of the BA.2.12.1 variant, such as central New York, suggesting something about it is causing it to out-compete others, says Eli Rosenberg of New York state's health department.</p> <p>It appears a similar pattern will likely play out nationally, says Kirsten St. George, director of virology at New York state's Wadsworth Center Laboratory.</p> <p>Scientists are trying to figure out other aspects of BA.2.12.1, including whether vaccines are as effective against it as previous variants.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia releases jailed USMC veteran
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-united-states-prisoner-exchange-8fd1e58e690350019c7aab55af41bbbf
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia and the United States carried out a dramatic prisoner exchange on Wednesday, trading a Marine veteran jailed in Moscow for a convicted Russian drug trafficker serving a long prison sentence in America, a senior U.S. official and the Russian foreign ministry said.</p> <p>The surprise deal would have been a notable diplomatic maneuver even in times of peace, but it was all the more extraordinary because it was done as Russia's war with Ukraine has driven relations with the U.S. to their lowest point in decades.</p> <p>As part of the exchange, Russia released Trevor Reed, a former Marine from Texas who was arrested in the summer of 2019 after Russian authorities said he assaulted an officer while being driven by police to a police station following a night of heavy drinking. Reed was later sentenced to nine years in prison, though his family has maintained his innocence and the U.S. government has described him as unjustly detained.</p> <p>The U.S. agreed to return Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot serving a 20-year federal prison sentence in Connecticut for conspiracy to smuggle cocaine into the U.S. after he was arrested in Liberia in 2010 and extradited to the U.S.</p> <p>Russia had sought his return for years while also rejecting entreaties by high-level U.S. officials to release Reed, who was nearing his 1,000th day in custody and whose health had recently been worsening, according to his family.</p> <p>A senior U.S. official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter by name and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity, described Reed's case as one of "utmost priority" for the Biden administration, including because of his health. The official noted that Yaroshenko, whose sentence has now been commuted, had already served the majority of his sentence.</p> <p>"It was a difficult decision but one that we thought was worth it," the official said.</p> <p>The two prisoners were swapped in a European country. Though officials would not say where the transfer took place, in the hours before it happened commercial flight trackers identified a plane belonging to</p>

Russia's federal security service as flying to Ankara, Turkey. The U.S. Bureau of Prisons also updated its website overnight to reflect that Yaroshenko was no longer in custody.

Reed was en route back to the U.S., traveling with Roger Cartsens, the U.S. government's special presidential envoy for hostage affairs.

The prisoner swap marks the highest-profile release during the Biden administration of an American deemed wrongly detained abroad and comes even as families of detainees who have met over the last year with administration officials had described them as cool to the idea of an exchange.

In a statement, the Reed family thanked President Joe Biden "for making the decision to bring Trevor home" as well as other administration officials and Bill Richardson, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations whom the family said traveled to Moscow in the hours before [the Ukraine war began](#) in hopes of securing Reed's release.

Reed was one of several Americans known to be held by Russia, including WNBA star Brittney Griner, [who was detained in February](#) after authorities said a search of her bag revealed a cannabis derivative, and Michigan corporate security executive Paul Whelan, [who is being held on espionage-related charges](#) his family says are bogus. It was unclear what if any impact Wednesday's action might have on their cases.

Reed's parents [scored a rare private meeting with Biden and administration officials](#) last month. They had stood weeks earlier along his motorcade route during a presidential visit to Texas in hopes of attracting his attention, then later demonstrated outside the White House to ask for a meeting.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Deutsche Bank: US faces a major recession
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/26/economy/inflation-recession-economy-deutsche-bank/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)Deutsche Bank raised eyebrows earlier this month by becoming the first major bank to forecast a US recession, albeit a "mild" one.</p> <p>Now, it's warning of a deeper downturn caused by the Federal Reserve's quest to knock down stubbornly high inflation.</p> <p>"We will get a major recession," Deutsche Bank economists wrote in a report to clients on Tuesday.</p> <p>The problem, according to the bank, is that while inflation may be peaking, it will take a "long time" before it gets back down to the Fed's goal of 2%. That suggests the central bank will raise interest rates so aggressively that it hurts the economy.</p> <p>"We regard it...as highly likely that the Fed will have to step on the brakes even more firmly, and a deep recession will be needed to bring inflation to heel," Deutsche Bank economists wrote in its report with the ominous title, "Why the coming recession will be worse than expected."</p> <p>Behind the curve</p> <p>Consumer prices spiked by 8.5% in March, the fastest pace in 40 years. The jobs market remains on fire, with Moody's Analytics projecting that the unemployment rate will soon fall to the lowest level since the early 1950s.</p> <p>To make its case, Deutsche Bank created an index that tracks the distance between inflation and unemployment over the past 60 years and the Fed's stated goals for those metrics. That research, according to the bank, finds that the Fed today is "much further behind the curve" than it has been since the early 1980s, a period when extremely high inflation forced the central bank to raise interest rates to record highs, crushing the economy.</p>

History shows the Fed has "never been able to correct" even smaller overshoots of inflation and employment "without pushing the economy into a significant recession," Deutsche Bank said.

Given that the job market has "over-tightened" by as much as two percentage points of unemployment, the bank said, "Something stronger than a mild recession will be needed to do the job."

The good news is that Deutsche Bank sees the economy rebounding by mid-2024 as the Fed reverses course in its inflation fight.

Goldman Sachs: Recession is not inevitable

Of course, no one knows precisely how this will play out. Although Deutsche Bank is pessimistic -- it's the most bearish among major banks on Wall Street -- others contend this gloom-and-doom is overdone.

Goldman Sachs concedes it will be "very challenging" to bring down high inflation and wage growth, but stresses that a recession is "not inevitable."

"We do not need a recession but probably do need growth to slow to a somewhat below-potential pace, a path that raises recession risk," Goldman Sachs economists wrote in a report Friday evening.

UBS is similarly hopeful that the economic expansion will continue despite the Fed's shift to inflation-fighting mode.

"Inflation should ease from current levels, and we do not expect a recession from rising interest rates," Mark Haefele, chief investment officer at UBS Global Wealth Management, wrote in a report on Monday.

War and Covid lockdowns pressure inflation

Deutsche Bank said the most important factor behind its more negative view is the likelihood that inflation will remain "persistently elevated for longer than generally anticipated."

The bank said several developments will contribute to higher-than-feared inflation, including: the reversal of globalization, climate change, further supply-chain disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine and [Covid lockdowns in China](#) and coming increases to inflation expectations that will support actual inflation.

"The scourge of inflation has returned and is here to stay," Deutsche Bank said.

If inflation does stay elevated, the Fed will be forced to consider more dramatic interest rate hikes. The Fed raised interest rates by a quarter-percentage point in March and Chairman Jerome Powell conceded last week that a [half-point hike is "on the table"](#) at next week's meeting.

"It is sorely tempting to take a go-slow approach hoping that the US economy can be landed softly on a sustainable path. This will not happen," Deutsche Bank said. "Our view is that the only way to minimize the economic, financial and societal damage of prolonged inflation is to err on the side of doing too much."

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HEADLINE	04/27 San Francisco population plummets
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/san-francisco-activist-says-were-not-going-to-move-were-fighting-as-drugs-and-crime-consume-bay-area
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO – San Francisco’s population plummeted by more than 100,000 residents from 2020 to 2021, but despite spiraling drug and crime crises, one Bay Area resident says he will stay and fight to save his city.</p> <p>"I’ve been here 20 something years ... I would not leave. We are fighting for this city," said Richie Greenberg, a former Republican candidate for San Francisco mayor. "We’re not going to move, we’re fighting."</p>

Greenberg spoke to Fox Digital while walking through the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin district, a neighborhood notorious for open drug use and crime.

"They come through on a regular basis to ensure that it's sanitary ... They try and remove the tents if possible, and any garbage, needles," he said.

According to Greenberg, when there is a special event near City Hall, a few blocks from the Tenderloin, there is always a push to clean up.

"They don't want the embarrassment," said Greenberg, who is also a spokesman for the [Recall Chesa Boudin Committee](#).

Boudin faces a recall vote on June 7.

"A lot of the support that we are getting are from those who are victims. The most common is either - their home has been broken into, or their car has been broken into," said Greenberg.

People for and against embattled District Attorney, Chesa Boudin, who took office in January 2020, point to [crime statistics](#) to state their case.

According to numbers provided by the SFPD, both property and violent crime are down from 2019.

Greenberg told Fox News, however, he thinks the DA's supporters cherry-pick stats.

"They will show the reports of those that are actually down, and ignore arson, carjacking and things like that," said Greenberg.

The SFPD reported that arson is down 21.9% from this time last year, but motor vehicle theft is up 5.6% in that same time period across the city.

According to the SFPD, property crime in general is up 10.4% in San Francisco from this point last year.

In the Tenderloin, drivers now leave signs inside their vehicles notifying would be burglars there is nothing of value inside.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported in January that shootings jumped 33% from 2020 to last year.

"The police department themselves are understaffed and over worked, so they are out trying to figure out which crimes they need to answer more urgently than others," said Greenberg.

During her "State of the City" speech on March 9, SF Mayor London Breed acknowledged the progressive city had been plagued by rampant vandalism, car and home break-ins, drug use and gun violence.

"Too many people across the city, don't feel safe," Breed admitted. Yet, she went on to downplay crime as "noise" from "right wing media" outlets.

"You know, there's a lot of noise about what's happening in our city. You see it in the headlines, often in the right-wing media. They love to talk about San Francisco, don't they? You see it on social media. You see one video take off as if it's telling the whole truth about who we are. I know it's challenging with all that noise to really understand what's happening," the mayor said.

The "noise" may be keeping tourists away. Tourism was up 25% in 2021 from 2020, but down 44% from a record high in 2019, according to San Francisco Travel.

	<p>"The most difficult thing is our city's leadership," said Greenberg. "The elected leaders and who they appoint to these different departments, they're all a mess," he added.</p> <p>Stand With Chesa, a group funded by San Franciscans Against the Recall of Chesa Boudin, denied a request by Fox News for an interview with Boudin.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Fauci: US 'certainly' out 'pandemic phase'
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fauci-us-is-certainly-out-of-the-pandemic-phase
GIST	<p>After three years, the United States might be soon moving past the coronavirus pandemic, according to the country's leading infectious disease expert.</p> <p>Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has been the mouthpiece for the government's coronavirus response across two presidential administrations, said during an interview on Tuesday that the U.S. was "certainly" out of the pandemic stage, though he cautioned that the larger, global pandemic was still ongoing.</p> <p>"We are certainly right now in this country out of the pandemic phase," Dr. Fauci said during an interview with PBS NewsHour Judy Woodruff, according to a transcript of the interview.</p> <p>Fauci's answer came immediately after he was initially asked, "How close are we to the end of this pandemic?" He called that an "unanswerable question."</p> <p>"We don't have 900,000 new infections a day and tens and tens and tens of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths. We are at a low level right now," Fauci added. "So, if you're saying, are we out of the pandemic phase in this country, we are."</p> <p>The president's chief medical advisor then followed his answer up by saying that the U.S. was "not going to eradicate this virus" and that the government should continue to "intermittently vaccinate people," per the transcript.</p> <p>He suggested that people may have to get vaccinated yearly and "longer" than they might expect in an effort to keep infections as low as possible.</p> <p>"That might be every year, that might be longer, in order to keep that level low. But, right now, we are not in the pandemic phase in this country," he repeated.</p> <p>As for the rest of the world, Fauci said there is "no doubt this pandemic is still ongoing."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Mystery fires strategic Russia facilities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/27/mystery-fires-sensitive-facilities-compound-russias-war-challenge/
GIST	<p>Unexplained fires at strategic locations in Russia, including a sensitive defense research site and the country's largest chemical plant, have raised suspicions of some kind of sabotage despite no evidence that most were not accidental.</p> <p>The latest fire, at two oil storage depots in the Russian city of Bryansk near the Ukrainian border, was triggered Monday by explosions, Russian media reported. The site's loss could disrupt vital oil supplies to the Ukraine war's northeastern front, where Russian troops are pressing ahead with an attempt to seize territory in the Donbas region.</p> <p>Footage shared on social media of one of the blasts suggested it was caused by "an air or missile strike," according to a tweet by Rob Lee, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. The depots are</p>

less than 100 miles from Ukraine, within range of that country's Tochka tactical ballistic missiles, Lee noted.

Oleksiy Arestovych, a military adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, declined to comment. "The Russian Federation carries responsibility for what happens on Russian territory," he said. "They need to provide the reasons for what's happening, not us."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia is still investigating the cause of the fires.

This month, Russia accused Ukraine of carrying out an attack using helicopters against an oil depot in Belgorod, less than 20 miles from the Ukrainian border. Ukraine has not commented on whether it was responsible.

But if Ukraine is behind the attacks on Russian soil, it would represent a major escalation in the war. It also would be a significant embarrassment for Russia, spotlighting how the country it invaded two months ago with the expectation of a swift victory has managed to strike back deep inside its territory.

At least two other fires well out of the range of Ukrainian missiles can't easily be explained.

Last Thursday, a [blaze](#) tore through the upper stories of the Defense Ministry's Second Central Research Institute in the town of Tver, northwest of Moscow; at least 17 people died, according to Russia's state-run [Tass](#) news agency. More than two dozen people were injured, the news agency said, including some who jumped for their lives out of the building's upper floors.

The institute is known as a center for highly sensitive research on key missile systems, including Russia's most advanced stealth programs as well as the Iskander missile, extensively used in Ukraine, and the S-400 air defense system.

Tass said initial inquiries suggested the fire was caused by an electrical fault but that a criminal investigation had been launched.

Hours later, Russia's biggest chemical plant [burned down](#), also for unknown reasons. The Dmitrievsky Chemical Plant, located about 208 miles northeast of Moscow in Kineshma, was a major supplier of propellants essential for the production of the precision-guided missiles Russia needs for the war.

A third [fire](#) then engulfed a sensitive facility at the College of Aerospace Engineering and Technology in the Moscow suburb of Korolyov, which is renowned as the home of the Soviet Union's and Russia's space programs.

The fact that so many fires have broken out at key locations in such a short period is "quite suspicious," said Dmitri Alperovitch, chairman of the Silverado Policy Accelerator think tank in Washington. However, he added, it is "really impossible to tell at this stage."

There are explanations other than sabotage, Alperovitch said. Accidental fires are not unusual in Russia, which has a reputation for poor maintenance, and Western sanctions are making it harder to secure spare parts for vital machinery.

Arestovych doubts Ukraine was involved in the fires at the defense-related facilities and suggested that Russian officials are setting fires to cover up evidence of corruption.

"I think you need to look for reasons inside Russia — for example, hiding the means by which money has been stolen from the Russian Defense Ministry," he said.

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HEADLINE	04/27 As talks of WWII, diplomacy losing steam
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/27/diplomacy-world-war-iii-russia-lavrov/

The specter of nuclear catastrophe hangs over the Russian war in Ukraine, [according to Russia's own top diplomat](#). Speaking on state television earlier this week, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned NATO countries against sending armaments to Ukraine, suggesting that such support was “pouring oil on the fire” and increasing the risk of confrontation between nuclear powers.

“Everyone is reciting incantations that in no case can we allow World War III,” [Lavrov said](#), insisting that Russia in no way wanted to drift down the path of nuclear strife with what he dubbed the Western “proxy” forces battling Russian troops in Ukraine. But he added that the risk was “serious, it is real.”

Lavrov and his boss, Russian President Vladimir Putin, are doing little themselves to extinguish the fire they started. Two months ago, Russia embarked upon an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine that has now bogged down into a bloody, sprawling conflict. On Tuesday in Moscow, Lavrov and Putin hosted U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, whose desperate entreaties for an immediate cease-fire and an “end” to the war “as soon as possible” appeared to make little impact.

Putin agreed “[in principle](#)” to allow the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross to help evacuate Ukrainian civilians camped out in the besieged Azovstal steel plant, the last redoubt of Ukrainian resistance in the devastated port city of Mariupol. But no cease-fire looks imminent as Russia continues its campaign in Ukraine’s south and east. After meeting Lavrov, Guterres admitted to reporters that it was “clear that there are two different positions on what is happening in Ukraine.”

What is not happening is any substantive process toward a diplomatic solution. Lavrov said current prospects for a settlement were “dismal,” pinning the blame on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for a lack of sincerity in negotiations. The Ukrainians counter that Russian atrocities against their civilians make any prospect of territorial or political concessions impossible and that, with support from abroad, they are beating Russia on the ground.

In a tweet, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba responded to Lavrov’s doom-mongering over nuclear conflict. “Russia loses last hope to scare the world off supporting Ukraine,” [he wrote](#). “Thus the talk of a ‘real’ danger of WWII. This only means Moscow senses defeat in Ukraine.”

An initial dialogue between the two sides hosted by Turkey looks to have borne little fruit. A [story in the Financial Times](#), citing sources briefed on conversations with Putin, claimed that the Russian president had “lost interest in diplomatic efforts to end his war” and was particularly irate after Ukraine managed to sink [the flagship of Russia’s Black Sea fleet](#). Putin appears determined not to be humiliated on the international stage and needs to locate some kind of clear victory in Russia’s shambolic war effort.

Both Ukrainian and Western officials have been skeptical about the Kremlin’s interest in peace talks, suspecting that they were a ruse to help Russia retool for new offensives. On Tuesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said at a congressional hearing](#) that he had seen “no sign to date” that Putin is serious about “meaningful negotiations.”

U.S. military officials believe Russia intends, in this next phase of the war, to seize control not just of the eastern Donbas region, but all of southeastern and southern Ukraine, creating a link to annexed Crimea while cutting off Ukraine entirely from the Black Sea. Most observers see the conflict only getting worse.

“Two months into the war against Ukraine there is no end in sight and Russia’s most recent actions even point to an intensification of the fight,” E.U. foreign policy chief Josep Borrell [wrote in a Tuesday blog post](#).

Everywhere one turns, the fault lines between Russia and the West are growing wider. Russian state energy giant Gazprom [moved Tuesday to suspend gas supplies](#) to Poland and Bulgaria for their refusal to pay for this gas in rubles via Russian banks — a stipulation recently decreed by Putin in a bid to counteract the weight of sanctions. Poland has already made plans to transition off Russian gas imports, while other European governments are accelerating their own. In an ongoing tit-for-tat game with Western

governments, Russia also announced a new wave of diplomatic expulsions, [including 40 German diplomats](#) this weekend.

NATO countries, meanwhile, are stepping up their deliveries of heavy weaponry to the Ukrainians — recent contributions include [British armored vehicles](#) fitted with anti-air missiles, [Dutch armored howitzers](#) and, significantly, [Gepard self-propelled antiaircraft guns](#) and antitank vehicles from Germany. Last week, President Biden announced another tranche of \$800 million worth of military aid to Ukraine, including heavy artillery and advanced drones.

On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin helped convene a meeting in Germany with military leaders from more than 40 NATO and non-NATO countries, as Western officials sought to better coordinate their near-term tactical response to Russia's southern offensives. The discussions followed Austin and Blinken's visit to the Ukrainian capital this weekend. "My trip to Kyiv reinforced my admiration for the way that the Ukrainian armed forces are deploying" the help they are getting, [Austin said](#). "Ukraine clearly believes that it can win. And so does everyone here."

But, in private, officials are a bit more nervous about the coming weeks. Though some military analysts suggest Russia's offensive capacity [may be close to exhaustion](#), the Kremlin seems determined to roll the dice and seize as much Ukrainian territory as possible. The government in Kyiv will need outside backing to mount a sustained defense.

"Time is not on Ukraine's side," Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in [closed-door comments provided to reporters traveling with him](#). "The outcome of this battle, right here, today, is dependent on the people in this room."

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HEADLINE	04/26 Fires burn Siberia but firefighters in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/04/26/siberia-fires-april-firefighting-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Fires are erupting in Siberia this spring, sending billowing smoke into the western United States that has tinted skies pink.</p> <p>Some experts are concerned that Russia may lack sufficient military resources to extinguish the blazes, especially as fire activity increases in the summer, given its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>This month, wildfires have already appeared on the peatlands of Russia's Far East, activating firefighting services. The Russian Federal Forestry Agency reported that it extinguished more than 600 fires over 37,000 hectares (about 91,000 acres) nationwide last week.</p> <p>One of the regions with the largest number of extinguished forest fires was in Omsk oblast. Videos from the Siberian Times showed wildfires raging across the Omsk and Tyumen oblasts in Western Siberia, while satellite data showed several fires across the landscape. Some of the fires have been burning for more than a week, even as lakes still appear frozen.</p> <p>Smoke from the fires has traveled thousands of miles, reaching the western United States. People have noted hazier skies, smokier sunsets and reddish hues over the moon — features typically seen during the height of the summer fire season.</p> <p>The National Weather Service office in Tucson posted a Twitter thread tracing the origins of the smoke, which revealed scores of fire hot spots sensed by satellites over Russia. Smoke from one particularly large fire wrapped into a storm system that tracked across the Pacific Ocean and reached the West Coast on Saturday. The Weather Service also wrote that some of the smoke reaching the West Coast originated in Mongolia and China, while dust from the Gobi Desert may have been mixed in with the smoke.</p>

Fire activity in Siberia has picked up in spring in recent years. Wildfires occurred in these oblasts about the same time in 2020. Fires appeared in late April last year, although the largest clusters began burning in the Sakha region in Russia's Far East in early May.

"The data are showing that the fires are occurring in the spring fire season, but there has been a high number of fires and the daily total intensity/emissions were well above average for the early stages of the season," Mark Parrington, a senior scientist with the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, wrote in an email.

At a [news conference](#) Thursday, Russia's Federal Forestry Agency said firefighters are prepared and will work on high alert to manage and prevent fires in coming weeks. The head of the agency, Ivan Sovetnikov, said about 90 percent of spring forest fires are associated with human activities — fires that spread to forests from other lands, are caused by prohibited agricultural burns or are a result of carelessness. The agency will deploy helicopters, drones and even artificial precipitation.

But some think the invasion of Ukraine could reduce Russia's firefighting resources, with many personnel and a great deal of equipment deployed to the war. In past years, as fires intensified with summer's approach, the Russian military often aided [firefighters](#). Helicopters and planes can dump water on blazes, while thousands of ground troops waded through swamps and the intense heat to put out fires.

"There's no question that Ukraine has been a huge drain on the ground resources for Russia," said Col. [Mark Cancian](#), a senior adviser with the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "They moved a lot of troops outside of the country. Any troops that are going back are pretty beat-up. It's going to be harder to fight" the fires.

Even without a war, many large fires [are allowed to burn](#) if they do not threaten major settlements because of insufficient funding for firefighters.

Without appropriate firefighting resources, wildfires go unchecked and can spread uncontrollably, including on Siberia's carbon-rich soils. Much of the soil is composed of organic matter that is hundreds of years to millennia old, with large quantities of carbon buried deep within the permafrost. Fires can burn deep within the thawing soil, [releasing large amounts of carbon and methane into the atmosphere](#).

The fires also release particles that can harm human health and the environment. For instance, black carbon can enter the lungs of people and animals and cause disease. It can irritate eyes, noses and throats. The particles also can absorb sunlight and heat the ground below, potentially further exacerbating fire conditions in the area.

Although it's too soon to project the intensity of wildfire activity this spring and summer, rising global temperatures have intensified fire seasons and will probably continue to do so. [Studies show](#) that the number of forest fires and the size of the burned area has increased in Siberia in recent decades, correlating with air temperatures and drought. [Computer models also show](#) that rising global temperatures will dry out vegetation in the region, increasing the annual number of fire-danger days and large blazes, particularly in southern Siberia and in Sakha in the Far East.

The past few years have highlighted this threat. At one point last year, fires in Siberia were larger than all other fires in the world put together. [From June 1 to Aug. 1](#), fires emitted a record-breaking amount of carbon for Sakha.

[A report](#) by the European Commission ranked carbon emissions from last year's Arctic wildfires as the fourth highest in almost two decades. These levels were considered "normal" compared with the historically active seasons of 2019 and [2020](#), said [Parrington](#), noting that those years had higher fire activity across the Arctic Circle than 2021, although not necessarily in Sakha.

"It's difficult to say if these are indicative of what we could expect for the summer — I expect there will be fires in more eastern regions of Siberia, and possibly in the Arctic, during the summer," Parrington

	wrote. “The fire risk is likely to be high based on the climate anomalies (i.e. warmer and drier conditions) in recent years and months. The locations and duration will depend on the meteorological conditions, though.”
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HEADLINE	04/25 Recall: ground beef products
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/04/26/e-coli-ground-beef-recall/
GIST	<p>About 120,000 pounds of ground beef products sold to stores across the country were recalled Monday, federal food regulators announced, warning that contaminated meat could be in people’s freezers.</p> <p>More than 40 ground beef products that were produced from Feb. 1 through April 8 and sold nationwide may contain bacteria that can cause diarrhea and vomiting, although no cases of illnesses have been reported, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service wrote in a statement. The products from New Jersey-based Lakeside Refrigerated Services bear “EST. 46841” inside the USDA mark of inspection, regulators say.</p> <p>The recalled products, under a number of different brand names, including Thomas Farms and Nature’s Reserve, should be thrown away or returned, the USDA said.</p> <p>Inspectors discovered the problem during routine testing of imported products, regulators said, offering no more details about the issue. Lakeside Refrigerated Services did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>While most strains of the E. coli bacteria are harmless, the toxic strain about which the agriculture department warns, STEC O103, can cause a two-to-eight-day illness on average. Rarely, more severe infections can develop. Infection, which can cause bloody diarrhea and vomiting, is usually diagnosed by a stool sample test.</p> <p>The same strain, a relatively infrequent source of outbreaks, was discovered in 2019 in ground beef and sickened at least 109 people in six states.</p> <p>Other foods, including vegetables, fresh fruits and chicken, have carried E. coli that led to recent outbreaks. In 2018 and 2019, days before Thanksgiving, millions of Americans were warned against eating romaine lettuce after dozens became ill.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 ‘Red Dawn’ bizarre reality in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/88gpm3/red-dawn-becomes-bizarre-reality-in-ukraine-with-wolverines-graffiti
GIST	<p>Someone is spray painting “wolverines” on destroyed Russian vehicles in Ukraine. It’s probably a reference to the classic Cold War film, <i>Red Dawn</i>, about a group of American teens who fight to protect their small Colorado town after a Soviet invasion.</p> <p>As first reported by Task & Purpose, one of the earliest instances of the graffiti showed up on a T-72 spotted on a Ukrainian roadway on April 7. Since then, the graffiti has appeared all over downed Russian assets.</p> <p>Journalist Nolan Peterson noticed it written on the barrel of a tank in Western Kyiv.</p> <p>Ukrainian citizens and OSINT accounts are collecting pictures of the phenomenon and sharing them on social media.</p> <p>In <i>Red Dawn</i>, the Soviet Union invades America and the audience watches as a group of kids resists occupation using guerilla warfare. When the kids destroyed a piece of Soviet military equipment, they’d spray paint the name of their high school mascot— “Wolverines”—on to it.</p>

Return to Top	<p>It's jarring to see the graffiti from the film pulled into the real world, sometimes sprayed onto the same military vehicles the villains used in the movie. In the U.S., 1984 was peak anti-Soviet jingoism. The Cold War was in its final phases and <i>Red Dawn</i> represented an apotheosis of that attitude in pop culture.</p> <p>Colorado and Ukraine are far apart, but the images of burned out tanks tagged on highways are similar in both places. It's surreal and disturbing to see images from a war zone that imitate a Hollywood film so perfectly.</p> <p>Someone in Ukraine, or possibly multiple someones, is using <i>Red Dawn</i> as inspiration for tagging Russian military equipment. No one seems to know who. Days after Russia invaded in February, an Instagram account started named "wolverinesukraine." Its first post was a reference to Red Dawn.</p> <p>In subsequent weeks, the account has posted photos from Ukraine, including pictures of soldiers posting next to wolverines graffiti on destroyed tanks. It's unclear who the Wolverines are and what their connection is to the Ukrainian military. Motherboard reached out to the account directly but did not hear back.</p> <p>Like the Ghost of Kyiv and the power of the Ukrainian tractor, the wolverines graffiti has become a meme of the war. We may never know who is tagging down Russian armor, but we know they've seen <i>Red Dawn</i> and are good at leveraging pop culture in a way that resonates with the West, and especially Americans.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Kyiv-area morgues at breaking point
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/kyiv-area-morgues-ukrainian-coroners-war-casualties
GIST	<p>The first body arrived in late February, a few days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. The next day, two more. By the beginning of March, the morgue, on the outskirts of Kyiv, had no more space for the dead who, every day, arrived by the dozen from the cities of Bucha and Borodyanka – at the time occupied by the Russian forces.</p> <p>When Moscow's withdrawal from the areas north of the capital early in April unveiled the brutality of mass graves, with hundreds of civilian corpses buried in residential districts, every morgue in the Kyiv region was already at breaking point.</p> <p>Today, more than two months after the war began, bodies are being piled in refrigerated trucks in front of the morgues, as authorities struggle to handle the number of dead.</p> <p>"We weren't prepared for this," said a coroner from a village a few kilometres from the capital. "No one would ever have imagined that it would come to this."</p> <p>Survivors of Bucha, Borodyanka, Irpin and Hostomel, where Russians are accused of war crimes against civilians, did not stop to celebrate their liberation, starting immediately instead to count and identify their dead. Each day, dozens of people now approach the refrigerated trucks to put the names of their loved ones to the bodies closed in black bags and piled one on top of the other.</p> <p>"Up to Sunday, 1,123 bodies were recovered in the Kyiv region alone, with 35 children among them," said Oleh Tkalenko, a senior prosecutor for the Kyiv region. "These are the bodies that we have dug out from mass graves or that we have found on the streets. We have found brutalised people. All 1,123 cases are being documented and examined by detectives. And, every day, we continue to uncover more bodies. I can't give any more precise information because there are thousands of reports being written."</p> <p>Vladyslav Perovskyi, a Ukrainian forensic doctor who, with a team of coroners, has carried out dozens of autopsies on people from Bucha, Irpin and Borodyanka who died during Russia's month-long occupation</p>

of the area, explains that the process of identifying corpses is complex, given the state of decomposition of the bodies found in the mass graves and the high level of brutalisation perpetrated on the victims, even after they were killed.

He tells of people killed and then crushed by tanks. “There are many burnt and disfigured bodies that are just impossible to identify,” he said. “The face could be smashed into pieces. You can’t put it back together. Sometimes, there’s no head at all.”

His team, which operates in a morgue that cannot be identified for security reasons, has been examining about 15 bodies a day, many of them mutilated.

An elderly couple approaches the rear doors of the vehicle. Through tears, they communicate the identity of the victim to the men standing inside the trailer, in the midst of no less than 30 bodies. He was their son, who was serving in the civil resistance. The couple say he was allegedly betrayed by a woman when Russian soldiers occupied their town on the outskirts of the capital and were hunting down Ukrainian fighters and former soldiers who had taken part in the war in Donbas.

Their son was one of them. The Russians captured him, tortured him, broke his arms and legs and put a plastic bag over his head. Then they shot him dead in the head and threw his body on the side of the road. His corpse remained there, for days, until it was found by volunteers.

When the men inside the vehicle show her the body of her son, the woman bursts into inconsolable cries and screams, as she curses the Russian soldiers, wishing them the same fate.

A tattoo on his shoulder is the only identifying sign on an almost completely unrecognisable body, marked by decomposition and brutalisation. When the woman sees it, she nods and is accompanied to the car, in tears.

Before his body can be buried, however, it will first have to be examined by Perovskyi’s team, who, alongside 18 experts from the forensic department of France’s national gendarmerie, have started documenting the terror inflicted on civilians during the month-long occupation.

“We are seeing a lot of mutilated bodies,” said Perovskyi. “A lot of them had their hands tied behind their backs and shots in the back of their heads. There were also cases with automatic gunfire, like six to eight holes on the back of victims. And we have several cases of cluster bombs’ elements embedded in the bodies of the victims.”

Russia has repeatedly denied targeting civilians and has said Ukrainian and western allegations of war crimes are concocted. Evidence of death and destruction in the areas occupied by Moscow’s troops seems to suggest otherwise.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Time running out to reach Iran nuclear deal
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/time-running-out-to-reach-iran-nuclear-deal-warn-experts
GIST	<p>Leading former diplomats including seven ex-UK foreign and defence ministers have warned the Iran nuclear talks are heading to “corrosive stalemate devolving into a cycle of increased nuclear tension” and urged Tehran and Washington to show more flexibility.</p> <p>Year-long talks in Vienna on reviving the deal and for the US, which was pulled out of the agreement by Donald Trump, to lift sanctions on Iran have in effect ground to a halt in a dispute over whether the west will lift the foreign terrorist organisation designation, and sanctions, against the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).</p>

The former diplomats said in an open letter that a final draft text of a renewed agreement was ready to be signed and warned that “for US and European leaders to let slip the opportunity to defuse a nuclear crisis in the Middle East would be a grave mistake”.

Washington says the sanctions on the IRGC do not relate to the nuclear deal, but to its long-term terrorist behaviour in the region, including in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

The signatories to the open letter, coordinated the European Leadership Network, include former senior diplomats in 14 countries including the former foreign secretary Jack Straw, former defence secretaries Lord King and Des Browne, as well as the former Conservative Middle East minister Alistair Burt.

They say the legacy of Trump’s strategic error in leaving the agreement “can today be measured in the tons of enriched uranium Iran has since accumulated, including uranium enriched to near-weapons grade; in the thousands of advanced centrifuges it is spinning; and, in the rapidly dwindling timeframe for Iran to reach a breakout capability”.

The US left the nuclear deal in 2018. [Joe Biden on his election as president](#) said he wanted to rejoin so long as Iran came back into compliance with the agreement on nuclear non-proliferation.

One proposal that Israel fears the US administration will adopt is to retain sanctions on the elite foreign arm of the IRGC, the al-Quds force, but lift the designation on the IRGC domestically.

The letter’s authors acknowledge the politics of the foreign terrorist organisation designation are difficult but insist “there are ways to provide the counter-terrorism benefits of the current designation while still accommodating Iran’s specific request, and consider it imperative that these be fully explored”.

“For its part, Iran should not expect a nuclear deal to address broader areas of disagreement between Tehran and Washington. Both sides must approach this final phase of negotiation with an understanding that the strategic implications of failure would be grave and profound.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 War to keep food, energy prices high 3yrs
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/26/ukraine-war-food-energy-prices-world-bank
GIST	<p>The war in Ukraine will result in expensive food and energy for the next three years, the World Bank has warned, intensifying fears that the global economy is heading for a rerun of the weak growth and high inflation of the 1970s.</p> <p>In a gloomy analysis, the Washington-based development organisation said there was a risk that persistently high commodity costs lasting until the end of 2024 would lead to stagflation – sluggish activity combined with strong cost of living pressures.</p> <p>The Bank’s latest commodity markets outlook said that over the past two years the world had seen the biggest increase in energy prices since the 1973 oil crisis and the biggest jump in food and fertiliser prices since 2008. While the costs of energy and food were likely to retreat from their current levels, they were forecast still to be above the average for the past five years at the end of 2024.</p> <p>As a result of trade and production disruptions caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Bank is forecasting a 50% rise in energy prices this year. It expects the price of Brent crude oil to average \$100 a barrel in 2022, its highest level since 2013 and an increase of more than 40% compared with 2021. Prices are expected to fall back to \$92 in 2023 but will remain well above the five-year average of \$60 a barrel.</p> <p>European gas prices are expected to be twice as high in 2022 as they were in 2021, while coal prices are expected to be 80% higher. The Bank expects wheat prices to increase more than 40% this year, putting pressure on developing economies that rely on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine.</p>

	<p>Indermit Gill, a World Bank vice-president, said: “Overall, this amounts to the largest commodity shock we’ve experienced since the 1970s. As was the case then, the shock is being aggravated by a surge in restrictions in trade of food, fuel and fertilisers.</p> <p>“These developments have started to raise the spectre of stagflation. Policymakers should take every opportunity to increase economic growth at home and avoid actions that will bring harm to the global economy.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 NKorea: if threatened, will use nuclear arms
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/kim-jong-un-says-north-korea-will-use-nuclear-weapons-at-any-time-if-threatened
GIST	<p>The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has vowed to move faster in bolstering his nuclear forces and threatened to use them if provoked in a speech during a military parade that featured powerful weapons systems that could be used to target the country’s rivals.</p> <p>His remarks suggest he will continue provocative weapons tests in a pressure campaign to wrest concessions from the US and its allies. The parade on Monday night was to mark the 90th anniversary of North Korea’s army – the backbone of the Kim family’s authoritarian rule – and was held as the country’s economy is battered by pandemic-related difficulties, punishing US-led sanctions and its own mismanagement.</p> <p>State media photos showed Kim, dressed in a white military ceremonial coat, smiling and waving from a balcony along with his wife, Ri Sol-ju, and other top deputies.</p> <p>“[We] will continue to take measures for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed,” Kim told his troops and the crowd gathered for the parade at a Pyongyang plaza, according to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).</p> <p>He repeated an earlier message that North Korea could pre-emptively use its nuclear weapons when threatened by attacks and called for his nuclear forces to be fully prepared to go “in motion at any time”.</p> <p>“The fundamental mission of our nuclear forces is to deter a war, but our nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent even at a time when a situation we are not desirous of at all is created on this land,” Kim said. “If any forces try to violate the fundamental interests of our state, our nuclear forces will have to decisively accomplish its unexpected second mission”, which would leave any invading force “perished”, he said.</p> <p>The parade featured thousands of goose-stepping troops shouting “hurrah!” and some of North Korea’s most powerful missiles. Some intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) could put the US homeland well within range, and a variety of shorter-range solid-fuel missiles pose a growing threat to South Korea and Japan.</p> <p>One of the weapons showcased at the brightly illuminated Kim Il-sung Square, named after Kim’s late grandfather and state founder, was North Korea’s biggest and newest ICBM, the Hwasong-17.</p> <p>North Korea claimed to have test-fired that missile successfully last month, but South Korea concluded the launch was of the smaller Hwasong-15 and that a launch of the Hwasong-17 had failed. Whichever weapon it was, the launch on 24 March was its first full-range ICBM flight test in more than four years and the missile flew longer and higher than any other missile North Korea has launched.</p> <p>KCNA said spectators at the parade raised loud cheers when they saw the Hwasong-17, which it said showed “the absolute power of <i>Juche</i> [self-reliance], Korea and the strategic position of our republic to the world”.</p>

North Korea often commemorates key state anniversaries by mobilising huge crowds to boost internal unity. Tuesday's KCNA dispatch praised Kim for accomplishing "the historic great cause of completing the nuclear forces by making a long journey of patriotic devotion with a death-defying will" to make his people free of war.

Kim has been reviving nuclear brinkmanship aimed at forcing the US to accept North Korea as a nuclear power and to remove crippling [economic sanctions](#), exploiting a favourable environment to push forward its weapons programme as the UN security council remains divided over Russia's war in Ukraine.

Nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have been stalled since 2019 because of disagreements over the potential easing of US-led sanctions in exchange for North Korean disarmament steps. Kim has stuck to his goals of simultaneously developing nuclear weapons and the country's dismal economy in the face of international pressure and has shown no willingness to fully surrender a nuclear arsenal he sees as his biggest guarantee of survival.

North Korea has conducted 13 rounds of weapons tests this year. There are also signs North Korea is rebuilding tunnels at a nuclear testing ground that was last active in 2017, possibly in preparation for exploding a nuclear device.

In 2017, North Korea claimed to have acquired an ability to launch nuclear strikes on the US mainland after a torrid run of nuclear and missile tests. North Korea had halted such high-profile tests before it entered the now-dormant diplomacy with the US.

Kim's aggressive military push could be motivated by domestic politics since he does not otherwise have significant accomplishments to show to his people as he marks a decade in power. He failed to win badly needed sanctions relief from his diplomacy with then-President Donald Trump, and the Covid-19 pandemic unleashed further shocks to the country's broken economy, forcing him to acknowledge last year that North Korea was facing its "worst-ever situation".

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HEADLINE	04/26 Possible radiation Ukraine war impact WA?
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3449623/ukraine-radiation-washington/
GIST	<p>Between battles fought at nuclear power plants, Russia's possession of nuclear weapons, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's threats, many fear that the war between Russia and Ukraine could turn nuclear.</p> <p>In such an event, how safe would Washington be from radiation?</p> <p>While Washington has felt slight upticks in radiation levels caused by world events, the good news is, those increases were minimal.</p> <p>Mike Priddy is a physicist at the Washington State Department of Health's Office of Radiation Protection, where he supervises the environmental sciences section. He and his colleagues measure radiation in our air daily and were doing so even before the war in Ukraine began.</p> <p>"Most likely, [Russia] would use a small tactical nuclear weapon, if one were to be used — and I think that's unlikely — and the effects here in Washington would be negligible," Priddy said.</p> <p>A good example, he said, is the Chernobyl disaster, which occurred 36 years ago this week. At that point, some radiation did make its way through strong winds from Ukraine all the way to Washington — but not enough to cause harm.</p> <p>"For the average citizen in the state of Washington, the increase in the radiation exposure from that accident was equivalent or on the scale of what you would experience on a cross-country airline flight," Priddy said.</p>

Some people may think the increase in radiation exposure on flights comes from the airport security scans, but people actually get more radiation — though overall still a very small dose of it — [from the flight itself](#).

“When you fly in an airplane, you’re up higher in the atmosphere and you’re not shielded from cosmic radiation. Therefore you get a slight increase in your exposure,” Priddy explained. “That’s roughly the exposure we received in the state of Washington from the Chernobyl accident.”

The world’s other largest nuclear plant disaster, Fukushima in Japan in 2011, also caused measurable increases in radiation in Washington state.

“After that event, we were able to detect low levels of increased radiation in this state as a result of the Fukushima event. It never got to the point where it posed any sort of public health risk,” Priddy said. “But we were able to detect it.”

Weapons testing has also not affected Washington — even when it was just a few states away.

“There have been over 500 surface detonations since the weapons were invented,” Priddy said. “Some of them have been in the United States. And some of those were in the Western United States. Our lives continued without any impact at all.”

What Priddy is most worried about is the effects that anxiety can have on our bodies if we are worrying excessively about nuclear war.

“Studies have shown that the fear of nuclear war or the fear of radiation can have serious influence on public health without any radiation at all,” he said.

The harm that stress causes to our immune systems, blood pressure, and other parts of our bodies outweighs the minor amounts of radiation we might receive from Ukraine, Priddy said.

That said, he noted that Washington is more prepared for a nuclear disaster than most other states. Besides the daily radiation measurements, staff at the DOH also monitor radiation levels throughout Europe, global weather, and winds multiple times a day to see how events around the world may impact us. The team has also been meeting with agencies from the federal government, other state governments, and the British Columbian government.

If you want to be extra prepared for any type of disaster — including Washington’s specialties, like earthquakes and volcanoes — Priddy suggests you have medications, supplies like radios and batteries, and enough food and water for a couple of weeks on hand.

“I think this is a good time to think about that and maybe make sure those stocks are up-to-date and you’re prepared,” Priddy said.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle mayor pushes out SPD press officer
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3448929/rantz-seattle-mayors-office-demands-control-over-police-messaging-press-officer-pushed-out/
GIST	<p>The sergeant who handles media for the Seattle Police Department was involuntarily reassigned after a heated meeting with the mayor. The staff shakeup occurred after the mayor criticized perceived miscommunications between his office and the SPD, where the relationship had otherwise been solid.</p> <p>Sergeant Randy Huserik’s last day as the public information officer was Wednesday.</p>

According to a source, Huserik learned of the decision a day after a meeting where he objected to Mayor Bruce Harrell's demand that his office screen and approve all messaging from the police department. The mayor's office did not deny this demand.

The communications strategy has bothered Harrell, who believed that his office and the SPD are not consistent in messaging. One perceived communications mishap led to a report that upset the mayor.

Two perceived communication missteps angered Harrell

Harrell was reportedly angry with two recent communications missteps that he blamed on the SPD. But it appears that Harrell's own office was responsible.

The mayor held a meeting after a *Seattle Times* report revealed that he halted a police effort to crack down on open-air drug use and drug dealing on 3rd Avenue downtown. The *Times* [reported](#) the decision was made at the "last minute," as officers were ready to use a rarely-enforced law against disorderly conduct near transit stops. It would have made an immediate impact since the [department never had the staff](#) to meet Harrell's promise of six dedicated patrol officers 24/7.

Harrell reportedly blamed the SPD communications team for the *Times* report. But the revelation came from the mayor's spokesperson, Jamie Housen.

"At the direction of the mayor's office, any decisions on enforcement have been postponed," Housen told the *Times*.

Before Housen's statement, an SPD captain offered details on the strategy, presumably not knowing the mayor's office killed the plan.

Two weeks later, the mayor was miffed by another communications issue.

The SPD posted a photo and note on Facebook explaining that the department donated some equipment to help Ukrainians defend themselves against Russia. The donations included unused helmets, vests, and other personal safety gear. Unbeknownst to the department, the mayor's office did not want this information made public, according to a source. But no one told the communications department and it's unclear why they did not want this post to go live.

Mayor's office seeks more control

According to a source, the mayor held another meeting with stakeholders over his displeasure with the second communication issue.

Harrell was reportedly unhappy for much of the call. He asked that the department run all messaging through the mayor's office to ensure they're on the same page and that the department is consistent with the mayor's statements. But a source says Huserik argued that, in some circumstances, it would not be practical to do so. For example, quick messaging concerning a public safety emergency may be necessary for certain situations.

Harrell wasn't budging from his position. He reportedly said that if the SPD communications team couldn't align with his plan, changes could be made.

The next day, a source says, Huserik was informed that he would be involuntarily reassigned.

Mayor's office doesn't deny details, otherwise has good relationship with the SPD team

There is no indication of bad blood between the two offices despite this staffing change. But there are some unanswered questions.

The mayor's office did not dispute anger over the perceived communication mishaps or demand that the department run messaging through their office. And through spokesperson Housen, the mayor's office doesn't directly answer if Harrell asked for Huserik to be reassigned.

“SPD staffing and deployment decisions are made by Chief [Adrian] Diaz and command staff. The mayor’s office seeks to work closely with SPD’s communications team, like all departments, to ensure message coordination and alignment,” Housen emailed the [Jason Rantz Show on KTTH](#).

But if all messaging from the SPD goes through the mayor’s office, which would be a new procedure, some argue this ensures Harrell will spin issues around public safety that may benefit him politically.

Spin concern from SPOG

Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) President Officer Mike Solan is unhappy with Huserik’s treatment. And he raises complaints that “some of the information shared with our community is at times filtered intentionally by City Hall to fit a specific political narrative.”

“I think the sergeant’s recent removal/involuntary transfer from SPD Public Affairs is indicative of City Hall wanting to control 100% of the public safety narrative from SPD Public Affairs. It is clear that if you deviate from City Hall’s narrative control, you’ll get removed,” Solan tells the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH via email. “This sergeant has carried the water for SPD Public Affairs for over two years and has worked exceptionally hard for our community. As the labor organization that represents line officers and sergeants within SPD, we must advocate for all members. The SPD Public Affairs sergeant that was involuntarily transferred is yet another example of the city intentionally violating our CBA. SPOG will continue to professionally represent our members, and we are proud to be Seattle police officers.”

I think these concerns are valid. It all depends on how far the mayor’s office goes with its messaging strategy.

The valid concerns

Of course, not all message coordination would lead to spin. It makes sense that there would be some coordination on messaging in certain situations.

But this does open up the SPD to unfair criticism that they may downplay public safety concerns or inaccurately frame data in ways that can help Harrell, who campaigned on tackling the crime wave.

It’s unclear how far the mayor’s coordination demands go. Will the SPD communications team offer comments to reporters working on stories? Or will they effectively provide a statement from the mayor’s office? How easy will it be for the SPD to coordinate messaging when there is a legitimate public safety reason to put statements out quickly? And given the chief of police is chosen by Harrell, it puts Diaz and any future chief in a tough and unfair spot. Can he speak openly and honestly in interviews or do talking points need to be approved by the mayor?

Harrell has publicly supported the police in ways that past mayors have not. He’s certainly more supportive than the city council. But this strategy opens him to legitimate criticism that he’s turning the SPD communications team into another arm of his office, which won’t always support public safety.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle councilmembers refuse return office
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3448732/rantz-most-seattle-city-councilmembers-refuse-to-return-to-the-office/
GIST	<p>Most Seattle city council members refuse to return to the office, sticking with COVID remote-work policies introduced two years ago. While they continue to stay home, other city workers were back in the office last month. The council is not offering a timeline on when they’ll return.</p> <p>Socialist councilmembers Kshama Sawant and Tammy Morales and Progressive councilmembers Debora Juarez, Lisa Herbold, Dan Strauss, Andrew Lewis, Tammy Morales, and Teresa Mosqueda will not return to the office to work, according to the council spokesperson.” They earn between \$65.82 and \$69.26 an hour, though they’re not engaged in the same workload when they’re at home. Their staff is working on hybrid schedules. The only council members to work from the office are moderate Democrats Alex Pedersen and Sara Nelson.</p>

In mid-March, roughly 35% of city staff worked remotely. After a return to work was announced, most of the holdouts returned to the office on at least a hybrid basis. Mayor Bruce Harrell's office reports only about 13% of the remaining staff are working from home (around 1650 employees).

So where is the council? None of the remote councilmembers responded to my request for comment, made through the communications department, to explain why they're staying home. On Tuesday, Lewis explained to independent journalist Jonathan Choe that he is working from the office and wants to return to in-person council meetings.

Working from home cuts off access

The council members who are choosing to stay home are skirting their duties.

Their decision dramatically cuts off constituents and media access to their offices. Not everyone has the time to hound council members or staff with emails that don't get answered. For example, Strauss is notoriously bad at responding to constituent complaints submitted via email. It's easy to excuse the behavior when you claim you're inundated with emails. It's harder to dismiss a complaint from someone who shows up to discuss their concerns.

There's likely also a connection between the lack of council-focused news stories in the media and not being able to go to City Hall to start asking questions and finding evasive council members.

Sometimes the best way to get answers, or track down stories, is to visit council members and their staff in the office.

Council members are sending the wrong message to small business

If the council wanted to push back at the notion that downtown is unsafe and small businesses are worthy of our support, they'd get back to the office. Not wanting to commute to city hall is no excuse to stay remote.

Seattle workers are lagging behind other cities in returning to the office. That many workers are in the tech sector, which allows for remote work wherever you find an internet connection, explains the low number of workers returning. That Amazon loathes most council members is likely making it easier for them to justify remote work, too.

But employees are also unlikely eager to return because downtown isn't safe. If a worker uses King County Metro to get to and from the office in or near downtown, they will understandably feel uncomfortable. Drug use is rampant, aggressive homelessness is consistent, and the lack of police staffing is consequential. Is Morales too scared to return to the office? That sends a message.

And the sooner downtown becomes crowded with residents who aren't smoking fentanyl by a bus stop on Third Avenue, the better it is for struggling businesses. On paper, the economy isn't struggling in Seattle, buoyed by the tech sector that didn't take the same COVID hit as other industries. But hundreds of small businesses closed for good and without a steady flow of workers, the remaining retail and restaurants will continue to struggle.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Russia tried to sell oil. Nobody wanted it
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-tried-to-sell-a-huge-slug-of-oil-nobody-wanted-it-11650995897
GIST	<p>Russia failed to sell a huge batch of oil, a sign that soon-to-be imposed sanctions against its state oil giant are playing havoc with the energy industry that undergirds its bruised economy.</p> <p>Moscow maintained a brisk pace of energy exports in the two months after the invasion, bringing in revenue that Kyiv says funds the Kremlin war machine. Many U.S. allies left oil and gas shipments out of their harshest sanctions on Russia. Importers in India and elsewhere swooped in to buy cheap Russian barrels at a time of rocketing energy prices.</p>

But exports hit a snag in recent days when [Rosneft](#) Oil Co. struggled to find buyers for enough oil to fill a fleet of tankers, traders familiar with the sale said. The producer, in which the government owns a large minority stake, had invited companies to bid for the oil last week, according to traders and a document seen by The Wall Street Journal.

A Rosneft spokesman had no immediate comment.

The problems with the sale give an early indication that European sanctions targeting Rosneft, and due to kick in on May 15, are starting to disrupt Russia's ability to move crude from oil fields to overseas buyers.

The sanctions are less stringent than a full ban on Russian imports. Many expect Europe eventually to adopt a phased [outright ban on bringing in Russian oil](#)—an embargo promoted by newly re-elected French President Emmanuel Macron but resisted by Germany and Hungary, among other members.

But sanctions already in place, laid out by the EU in mid-March, and replicated by Switzerland, will ban companies from reselling Rosneft oil outside of Europe. This includes sales into the big Asian market, especially India, which has soaked up some of the Russian oil demand since Moscow invaded Ukraine.

Traders will still be able to bring Rosneft crude and refined products into the EU and Switzerland, which were exempted in order not to worsen a shortage of diesel and other fuels. But many companies in Europe are rapidly finding non-Russian sources of oil. The sanctions also target [Transneft](#), the sprawling state pipeline system that carries oil to ports, creating an additional hurdle to handling Russian fuel.

If Rosneft keeps struggling to sell, it would represent a further shock for an economy already locked out of much of Western finance and commerce. The company says it is Russia's biggest taxpayer, [contributing a fifth of budget revenue](#). In total, Russia's oil and gas sales made up 45% of the federal budget in 2021, according to the International Energy Agency.

"If they can't sell, they'll have to start shutting down," said Adi Imsirovic, senior research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies and former head of oil trading at a subsidiary of Gazprom PJSC.

Rosneft, run by longtime Putin ally Igor Sechin, last week invited bids for about 5.1 million metric tons of Urals—or about 38 million barrels, enough to fill 19 large tankers—according to the traders and document. It asked for payment in rubles, an unusual twist, and said the oil would be loaded onto tankers at ports in the Baltic and Black Seas in May and June. Smaller volumes of other kinds of crude—including Siberian Light, Espo and Sokol—were also on offer.

Reuters earlier reported about Rosneft's inability to sell the oil.

Rosneft focuses on drilling for oil and gas, and refining crude into usable fuels. It has long outsourced most of the actual selling of the stuff to a handful of traders including Trafigura Group Pte. Ltd., Vitol and [Glencore PLC](#), which in turn shipped the oil to buyers around the world.

The traders are however retreating from the Russian market before the EU sanctions kick in. Vitol, the world's biggest independent oil trader and which has a three-decade presence in Moscow, expects to stop trading Russian oil by the end of the year, people familiar with the decision said.

Rosneft's tender was an attempt to export crude that trading companies were no longer willing to handle, people familiar with the sale said.

Unlike the U.S., Russia doesn't have much space to store oil, so dwindling [demand quickly backs up through the supply chain](#) and prompts producers to throttle back output. Once wells are turned off, they can be hard to turn back on to their previous capacity.

Production has already fallen since the Feb. 24 invasion, although the scale of the losses is hard to gauge because [Moscow is limiting the release of data](#) on a swath of sectors. Rosneft and smaller private producers will encounter longer-term problems stemming from sanctions on sales of Western parts and technology to Russia, analysts said.

In a sign that refiners outside Russia are hunting for alternative suppliers, the country's flagship Urals grade of crude is trading at roughly \$35 a barrel below the price of international benchmark Brent, said Tamas Varga, an analyst at brokerage PVM Oil Associates. Before the war, the two kinds of crude traded within a few dollars of each other.

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HEADLINE	04/27 DOJ new reform resource for police
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/27/police-reform-biden-knowledge-lab/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — The Justice Department is creating a comprehensive online portal and resource center aimed at improving community policing by providing law enforcement agencies and the public access to federal reports, training, academic research and subject-matter experts.</p> <p>Justice officials described the “National Law Enforcement Knowledge Lab” as an attempt to compile a one-stop shop of information and best practices that are scattered across federal agencies and outside organizations. The goal is to create a road map for police departments seeking to implement reforms at a time when concern about violent crime is causing some jurisdictions to rethink efforts to overhaul policing.</p> <p>Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta is scheduled to announce the initiative during a kickoff event in Los Angeles, where dozens of police officials, community leaders and civil rights advocates have gathered for two days of workshops to develop ideas, Justice officials said.</p> <p>The Justice Department is collaborating with the National Policing Institute, a nonprofit policy organization, and 21st Century Policing Solutions, an outside consultant, to build the portal, which will be overseen by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.</p> <p>At a time of rising gun violence and homicides, and nearly two years after the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were followed by nationwide calls to reimagine law enforcement, federal officials said they want to help communities combat crime by building trust between police and residents.</p> <p>In prepared remarks provided to The Washington Post, Gupta described the Knowledge Lab as a chance “to build a highly visible and trusted national resource for law enforcement agencies, communities and researchers to improve public safety through effective crime-fighting strategies, robust constitutional policing and stronger community relationships.”</p> <p>Though Attorney General Merrick Garland has opened sweeping pattern or practice investigations into police departments in Minneapolis, Louisville, Phoenix and Mount Vernon, N.Y., such probes are costly and time-consuming. The lab will be available to local jurisdictions at no cost. It is the department's latest effort to foster voluntary collaboration with the nation's 18,000 state, municipal and tribal law enforcement agencies. Justice officials last month launched the Collaborative Reform Initiative, which offers law enforcement agencies technical assistance from federal experts — another attempt to more quickly and broadly support local reform efforts.</p> <p>Jim Pasco, the executive director of the national Fraternal Order of Police, said his organization endorsed the idea of a Knowledge Lab in conversations with Justice officials last year. He described the concept as “not prescriptive, but reflective of the best thinking.”</p> <p>“It’s not mandated,” Pasco said. “But it’s training and advice and information that will be available to anyone in the law enforcement community who asks for it.”</p>

Civil rights groups have given mixed reviews to the Biden administration's efforts on criminal justice so far — applauding the return of Justice Department probes of police civil rights violations but decrying the lack of action on a promised executive order that would tighten rules for police. On Tuesday, Biden fulfilled a campaign promise, [commuting the sentences of 75 nonviolent drug offenders](#) in an effort to address long-standing disparities in criminal penalties.

Advocates have expressed concern that the police revision programs being offered by the Justice Department could become ways for local police chiefs or mayors to try to circumvent federal investigation, which typically result in court-mandated consent decrees that force agencies to make broad changes

But Garland and Gupta have emphasized that Justice will continue to use its investigatory powers as well. This month, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who oversees the civil rights division, [announced a federal consent decree with the Springfield, Mass., police department](#) after a two-year investigation found that officers in the narcotics unit had repeatedly used excessive force, including kicking and spitting on a juvenile.

Justice officials and some police representatives said a benefit of the collaborative programs is that local police officials are more likely to view them as supportive, not punitive. Gupta will unveil the Knowledge Lab effort at Los Angeles Police Department headquarters, and officials said Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison, whose department is operating under its second federal consent order, sent a video expressing support.

Community groups and civil rights organizations will have a hand in developing the portal and continued access to its information and resources, officials said. The portal will house a wide array of information, including reports from federal consent decree monitors and detailed reform plans from jurisdictions that have made progress. In some cases, Knowledge Lab consultants could be sent to help local jurisdictions directly.

In a statement, Los Angeles Police Chief Michael R. Moore said communities are “doing the work necessary to shape what comes next in policing.” He called the initiative “the ideal vehicle to bring those diverse experts and their experiences together for the shared goal of creating safer, healthier communities.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Stocks drop, April slump continues
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/business/stock-market-today.html
GIST	<p>Stocks slid on Tuesday, adding to a losing streak that has April shaping up to be Wall Street's worst month in two years.</p> <p>The S&P 500 fell 2.8 percent, bringing its losses for the month to 7.8 percent. The index is on track for its worst monthly decline since March 2020, when stocks plunged 12.5 percent as the coronavirus spread around the world, prompting lockdowns and halting economic activity.</p> <p>The steady drop — with only six days of gains in April — has come as investors have confronted a long list of fears: that the Federal Reserve could raise interest rates far more quickly than economists had anticipated; that rising prices and wages could erode corporate profits; and that renewed lockdowns in China could become another drag on the global economy.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the International Monetary Fund projected global growth would slow this year to 3.6 percent, from 6.1 percent in 2021. That was before a new Covid outbreak in Beijing raised concerns about more restrictions in China, the world's second-largest economy, where cities like Shanghai have already been under lockdown for weeks.</p>

“China slows down the rest of the world if it shuts down,” said Victoria Greene, the chief investment officer at G Squared Private Wealth, an advisory firm. “If China shuts down, that could shut down commerce, and that slows down overall global demand.”

On Tuesday, technology stocks led the retreat on Wall Street, ahead of earnings reports from Alphabet, Microsoft and — later in the week — Meta, Amazon and Apple. Shares of all five companies were lower. The Nasdaq composite, which is heavily weighted toward tech, fell about 4 percent.

Also lower were shares of Tesla, which fell more than 12 percent. The company’s chief executive, Elon Musk, may have to sell a big chunk of his stock in the carmaker to fund his takeover of Twitter. He has pledged \$21 billion in cash as part of the deal, in addition to loans. Tesla’s shares are often more volatile than those of other large companies, and they can weigh on the broader S&P 500 when they fall because of the company’s huge valuation.

“Tesla investors are worried that Musk might spend too much time trying to fix the social media giant’s problems, and that will take away his laserlike focus in winning the electric vehicle race,” said Edward Moya, a senior market analyst at OANDA.

Among the worst performers in the S&P 500 was General Electric, which fell 10.3 percent after it said its outlook for the year was “trending toward the low end” of its previous forecast for profits and listed nearly every one of Wall Street’s concerns as a factor.

“We’re experiencing increased pressure from inflation, renewable energy and the Russia-Ukraine war,” H. Lawrence Culp Jr., the company’s chief executive, said on a conference call with investors on Tuesday, when explaining the outlook. “We’re also watching to evolving areas, namely additional supply chain pressure and recent Covid impacts in China.”

Concerns over an economic slowdown in the United States and abroad have weighed on investors’ minds all month. Already, companies and consumers have borne higher costs for goods and transportation, with inflation reaching 8.5 percent in the year through March.

But the conflict in Ukraine and the shutdowns in China have also triggered volatility in energy markets, with crude oil surging in early March before retreating slightly in April. That has spilled over into the stock market, too.

“There’s been a pendulum going back and forth,” said Ms. Greene. “We go from saying oil prices are too high to saying we’re going to see oil prices come down because we don’t have the demand we thought we would see.”

Futures for Brent crude, the international standard, were up about 2.5 percent on Tuesday to about \$105 a barrel. West Texas Intermediate, the U.S. crude benchmark, for June delivery was up 3.2 percent to \$101.70 a barrel.

Investors are also contending with the Fed’s approach toward raising interest rates in the coming months in efforts to cool down inflation. Although Wall Street was already pricing in several rate increases this year, Fed officials have adopted a more aggressive tone this month about their willingness to raise rates quickly to try and stem inflation, and analysts are worried that the central bank could tip the economy into a recession.

“The only way to cool off inflation will be to destroy demand and raise unemployment,” said Jean Boivin, head of the BlackRock Investment Institute. “It won’t be as simple as raising rates as the markets are expecting.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 US marshals long-term military aid Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-germany-weapons.html

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The United States marshaled 40 allies on Tuesday to furnish Ukraine with long-term military aid in what could become a protracted battle against the Russian invasion, and Germany said it would send dozens of armored anti-aircraft vehicles. It was a major policy shift for a country that had wavered over fear of provoking Russia.

The announcement by Germany, Europe's biggest economy and one of Russia's most important Western trading partners, was among many signals on Tuesday pointing to further escalation in the war and disappointment for diplomacy.

Germany's shift on weapons also was seen as a strong affirmation of a toughened message by the Biden administration, which has said it wants to see Russia not only defeated in Ukraine but seriously weakened from the conflict that President Vladimir V. Putin began two months ago.

The increasing flow of Western weapons into Ukraine — including howitzers, armed drones, tanks and ammunition — also amounted to another sign that a war Mr. Putin had expected would divide his Western adversaries had instead drawn them much closer together.

"Putin never imagined that the world would rally behind Ukraine so swiftly and surely," the American defense secretary, Lloyd J. Austin III, said on Tuesday to uniformed and civilian officials at the U.S. air base in Ramstein, Germany, where he convened defense officials from 40 allied countries.

"Nobody is fooled" by Mr. Putin's "phony claims on Donbas," Mr. Austin said, referring to the eastern region of Ukraine, where Russia recently refocused its assaults. "Russia's invasion is indefensible and so are Russian atrocities," he said.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said on Tuesday that the influx of heavy weapons from Western countries was effectively pushing Ukraine to sabotage peace talks with Moscow, which have shown no concrete signs of progress.

"They will continue that line by filling Ukraine with weapons," Mr. Lavrov said after meeting in Moscow with the United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, who was undertaking his most active effort yet at diplomacy to halt the war. "If that continues, negotiations won't yield any result."

On Monday, Mr. Lavrov resurrected the specter of nuclear war, as Mr. Putin has done at least twice before. Mr. Lavrov said that while such a possibility would be "unacceptable" to Russia, the risks had increased because NATO had "engaged in a war with Russia through a proxy and arming that proxy."

"The risks are quite considerable," he said in an interview with Channel One, Russia's state-run TV network.

"I don't want them to be blown out of proportion," he said. But "the danger is serious, real — it must not be underestimated."

Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, called Mr. Lavrov's remarks a sign that "Moscow senses defeat in Ukraine." John F. Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, called them "obviously unhelpful, not constructive."

"A nuclear war cannot be won and it shouldn't be fought," he said. "There's no reason for the current conflict in Ukraine to get to that level at all."

Mr. Austin said the defense officials who had gathered at Ramstein Air Base — from Australia, Belgium, Britain, Italy, Israel and other countries — had agreed to form what he called the Ukraine Contact Group and to meet monthly to ensure they "strengthen Ukraine's military for the long haul."

"We are going to keep moving heaven and earth," to bolster the Ukrainian military, Mr. Austin said.

Germany's defense minister, Christine Lambrecht, announced at the meeting that Berlin would send Ukraine up to 50 armed vehicles, called Flakpanzer Gepard, designed to shoot down aircraft but also fire at targets on the ground.

Although no longer used by Germany, they have been acquired by Jordan, Qatar, Romania and Brazil, where they have been deployed to defend soccer stadiums from potential drone attacks during international tournaments, according to the manufacturer, Krauss-Maffei Wegmann.

The German government had previously cited a range of reasons to avoid shipping such heavy arms to Ukraine, including that none were readily available, that training Ukrainian soldiers to operate them was time-consuming and that Russia could be provoked into a wider conflict.

But German officials changed course under growing pressure from the conservative opposition in Berlin, and from members of the governing coalition. Germany has also supplied Ukraine with shoulder-launched antitank rockets and surface-to-air defensive missiles, some from old East German stockpiles.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who traveled with Mr. Austin to Ukraine this past weekend, affirmed on Tuesday that the United States would support the Ukrainian military in pushing Russian forces out of eastern Ukraine if that is what President Volodymyr Zelensky aims to do.

"If that is how they define their objectives as a sovereign, democratic, independent country, that's what we'll support," Mr. Blinken said at a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

After meeting with Mr. Putin in the Kremlin, Mr. Guterres said he had secured an agreement "in principle" to allow the United Nations and the Red Cross to evacuate civilians from a sprawling steel plant besieged by Russia in the southern Ukrainian port of Mariupol, where they have been holed up for days with Ukrainian fighters. But there was no evidence that the meeting had produced any advances in diplomacy to end the war.

Before the meeting, Mr. Putin asserted that Mr. Guterres had been "misled" about the situation in Mariupol, and he insisted that Russia had been operating workable humanitarian corridors out of the city — an assertion denied by Ukrainian officials, who say their attempts to ferry civilians out of the city have collapsed in the face of threats by Russian forces.

Mr. Putin told Mr. Guterres that he hoped continuing peace talks with Ukraine would bring "some positive result," according to the Kremlin. But Mr. Putin said Russia would not sign a security guarantee agreement with Ukraine without a resolution to the territorial questions in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and in Donbas, where Russia has recognized two separatist regions as independent.

In an escalation of the East-West economic conflict from the war, Poland's state-owned gas company said on Tuesday that Russia's state gas company had announced the "complete suspension" of natural gas deliveries to Poland through a major pipeline.

Poland, a NATO member and key conduit for Western arms into Ukraine, gets more than 45 percent of its natural gas from Russia, and cutting off that supply could impair its ability to heat homes and run businesses.

In addition to spreading suffering and death across Ukraine, the invasion has set off the largest exodus of European refugees since World War II.

More than five million people, 90 percent of them women and children, have already left Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24, according to the United Nations. A further 7.7 million have been driven from their homes by the conflict, but remain in the country.

On Tuesday, the United Nations projected that the number of refugees could rise to 8.3 million by year's end, and it asked donors for an additional \$1.25 billion to finance soaring humanitarian needs in Ukraine.

In another worrisome sign of possible spillover from the war, explosions rattled Transnistria, a small Moscow-backed breakaway republic in Ukraine's southwest neighbor, Moldova, for the second consecutive day.

It remained unclear who was behind the explosions. The authorities in Transnistria blamed Ukraine, while Ukraine accused Russia of having orchestrated the blasts.

Moldova's president, Maia Sandu, told reporters that there were "tensions between different forces within the regions, interested in destabilizing the situation."

At least 12,000 Russian troops are stationed in Transnistria, just 25 miles from Ukraine's major port, Odesa. Western officials have expressed concerns that Mr. Putin might create a pretext to order more troops into the territory, just as he did before Russian forces moved into Crimea and Donbas.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Blasts rattle breakaway region in Moldova
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/world/europe/explosions-transnistria-moldova-war.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — A series of explosions on Monday and Tuesday has rattled Transnistria, a small breakaway region within Moldova and bordering Ukraine, ramping up fears that the war next door could spill over into neighboring countries and swell into a wider conflict.</p> <p>It remained unclear on Tuesday who was behind the attacks in Transnistria, a self-declared Republic allied with — and heavily dependent on — Russia. Local authorities there blamed Ukraine, while Ukraine accused Russia of orchestrating the blasts as a pretext for further aggression.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military said Tuesday that Russian troops stationed in Transnistria had been put on high alert. Some Ukrainians have voiced fears that with Russia already invading their country from the east, south and north, they could add a new front from Transnistria, attacking from the west, as well.</p> <p>Moldova, a former Soviet republic, said the explosions were still under investigation, though one interior ministry official said some initial evidence suggested Russian involvement.</p> <p>As the Soviet Union dissolved in the early 1990s, heavily armed separatists in Transnistria, which has a sizable minority of Russian speakers, fought to break away from Moldova. With Russian backing, they effectively won independence, but Transnistria is not formally recognized internationally.</p> <p>There are at least 12,000 Russian troops stationed in Transnistria, which reached to within 25 miles of Odesa, Ukraine's chief port and third-largest city. Odesa is potentially a major target in Moscow's stalled push to seize Ukraine's Black Sea coast.</p> <p>A Russian general said last week that Russia intended to take control of a swath of land extending not just to Crimea, the peninsula it seized from Ukraine in 2014, but all the way to Transnistria. But it was not clear that his statement reflected Kremlin policy.</p> <p>The attacks in Transnistria were carried out against empty or unused buildings during a holiday, and there were no casualties, said Moldova's deputy interior minister, Sergiu Diaconu. He said explosions appeared to be an attempt to destabilize the country, and possibly serve as an excuse for a military response by Russia, not a serious bid to do harm.</p> <p>In addition, Mr. Diaconu said, the grenades that were used are produced by Russia and are only used by the armies of Russia, Transnistria and Gabon. He said of the attackers, "I don't think these were the Gabonese."</p> <p>Still, Moldovan authorities did not accuse Moscow of being behind the explosions. The country's president, Maia Sandu, did not mention Russia when asked on Tuesday about the attacks, saying only</p>

that there were “tensions between different forces within the regions, interested in destabilizing the situation.”

There were three separate explosions, local authorities in Transnistria said. One targeted a security-agency building in the capital, Tiraspol. The other blasts hit the local airport and a radio station in the village of Mayak.

Vadim Krasnoselsky, the president of Transnistria’s separatist government, called the explosions “terrorist attacks” and blamed Ukraine. “Traces of these attacks lead to Ukraine,” he said in a statement, without providing details. “I assume that those who organized this attack have the goal of dragging Transnistria into the conflict.”

For their part, Ukrainian officials were quick to point a finger at Russia. The Ukrainian defense ministry said its intelligence indicated that the explosions were “a planned provocation” by Russia aimed at inflaming “anti-Ukrainian sentiments.”

Russia’s deputy foreign minister, Andrei Rudenko, said on Tuesday that “forces disinterested in regional stability and wishing to create another hotbed of tensions are behind this.” He did not say who those forces were.

Transnistria, with a mixed population of Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian speakers, has been a problem for Moldova’s government for more than three decades, since retired Soviet military officers living there led the rebellion.

“Transnistria was artificially created to keep Moldova threatened all the time,” said Alexandru Flenchea, Moldova’s former deputy prime minister.

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Moldovan authorities have been increasingly anxious over the possibility that Russia might activate its Transnistria-based troops, either to attack Ukraine or to invade Moldova, which is not a member of NATO or the European Union, and has limited military forces.

Mr. Flenchea said the people running Transnistria might not be keen on war because it would interfere with one of the region’s major economic activities, smuggling.

Iulian Groza, the head of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms, a research institution in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau, said a Russian invasion of Moldova did not appear to be imminent. The short-term aim of the Russians, Mr. Groza said, seemed to be to destabilize the region and undermine the pro-European Union government of Moldova.

Whether the threat of an invasion is real or not, Moldovans are worried. Many people reacted to the news about the Transnistria explosions in a similar way as they did to the outbreak of the invasion of Ukraine — fearing the worst.

“People are in panic again,” said Carmina Vicol, the head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Chisinau. “The worst case is that war starts here and disrupts everything.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Canada Atlantic provinces virus resurgence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/world/canada/canadas-atlantic-provinces-covid-masks.html
GIST	In Canada’s Atlantic provinces, once a refuge of sorts from the pandemic, there has been a resurgence of known coronavirus infections at a time when most provinces have ended mask mandates and scaled back data surveillance on virus transmission.

The four eastern provinces — Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island — were relatively shielded, in part by their location, from the rampant virus transmission that gripped the rest of Canada during previous waves. Part of the strategy was to limit out-of-province travelers in what came to be known as the Atlantic “bubble.”

The “bubble” has burst, but inter-province travel is less of a concern for public health experts than the effects of recently ended mandates.

“We’ve started removing masks, which for Canada is a big deal,” said Tara Moriarty, an infectious disease researcher and professor at the University of Toronto.

But measuring the effect of changes in public health restrictions is hampered by a lack of public data, as most provinces have reduced the frequency of their reporting.

“The consequences are really serious in terms of the number of infections because people think that things are not too bad and they’re behaving accordingly,” Dr. Moriarty said.

In Nova Scotia, a province of about one million people, positive coronavirus test results have been rising since March, though the numbers may be “stabilizing,” according to a report issued by its public health authority. In Canada as a whole, the daily average of new cases is 10,073, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.

Some infectious disease experts, including Dr. Lisa Barrett, a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, have been recommending to the province that indoor mask mandates stay in place, and it’s unclear what the threshold would be to revive some public health measures.

“It’s really hard for people, without data being reported more frequently, to remember that we’re in a pandemic,” said Dr. Barrett, adding that the mask provided a useful visual cue.

Newfoundland and Labrador has also reduced its daily data reporting; the province recorded its highest number of Covid deaths in April.

Amy Hurford, an expert in infectious disease modeling at Memorial University in St. John’s, Newfoundland, has created her own dashboard.

“I think it fills a need, where people can get a better sense of situational awareness, by synthesizing the information that’s available from a number of different sources,” Dr. Hurford said.

Canada’s overall test positivity rate is 18 percent, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Despite a rise in hospitalization rates across some jurisdictions, critical care occupancy remains low, said Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer, in a news conference on Friday.

Booster shots also appear to have plateaued, months after the winter holiday frenzy to book limited appointments. About 81 percent of Canadians are fully vaccinated, and just over 47 percent have also received a booster, according to government data.

“We probably haven’t done enough good communication from all angles, public health and otherwise. And so we’re trying to do that once again, and give it another shot,” Dr. Tam said.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Day 63 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/27/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-63-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia will stop supplying gas to Poland and Bulgaria from Wednesday. Warsaw has refused to pay its supplier, Gazprom, in roubles and earlier announced that it was imposing sanctions on

50 entities and individuals including Russia's biggest gas company. Bulgaria, which is almost completely reliant on Russian gas imports, said it had fulfilled all its contractual obligations with Gazprom and that the proposed new payment scheme was in breach of the arrangement. Andriy Yermak, the chief of staff to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russia was "beginning the gas blackmail of Europe".

- **Russia's defence ministry warned of an immediate "proportional response" if Britain continues its "direct provocation" of the Kyiv regime**, after the UK armed forces minister, James Heappey, [described Ukrainian strikes on Russian soil that hit supplies and disrupt logistics as "completely legitimate"](#).
- **Volodymyr Zelenskiy said he believes Russia is trying to destabilise the situation in Moldova's Transnistrian region** after a series of explosions there, adding that Ukrainian armed forces were ready for a possible escalation by Russian troops in the temporarily occupied territory. "The goal is obvious – to destabilise the situation in the region, to threaten Moldova. They show that if Moldova supports Ukraine, there will be certain steps," Zelenskiy said in his latest national address. Russia has [refused to rule out Moldova's breakaway region Transnistria being drawn into the Ukraine war](#)
- **Zelenskiy said the "free world has the right to self-defence"** after predicting that Russia intends to not only seize the territory of [Ukraine](#) but to "dismember the entire centre and east of Europe" and "deal a global blow to democracy".
- **Britain's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, is expected to call on allies of [Ukraine](#) to "ramp up" and "double down" on military production** including of planes and tanks in a speech set to be delivered on Wednesday. Truss said the UK's new approach "will be based on three areas: military strength, economic security and deeper global alliances". A Russian victory would have "terrible consequences across the globe", Truss is expected to say. "We must be prepared for the long haul and double down on our support for Ukraine.
- **Germany will [authorise the delivery of 50 anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine](#)**, the German defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, said. Lambrecht said the government has agreed to sign off the delivery of around 50 Gepard anti-aircraft weapons systems. [Switzerland said it had blocked Germany from sending Swiss-made ammunition](#) used in Gepard anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine.
- **The United States vowed to move "heaven and earth" to help Ukraine win its battle against Russia's invasion** as it hosted defence talks in Germany with allies from 40 nations on Tuesday. [The gathering is being led by the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin](#), following his meeting with Zelenskiy on Sunday. [Austin said the west was gearing up to help Ukraine for "the long haul"](#) and would take steps to boost its rearmament.
- **Australia will send six M777 howitzers and ammunition to Ukraine** as part of a A\$26.7m package in its response to "Russia's brutal, unrelenting and illegal invasion" a statement from prime minister Scott Morrison and defence minister Peter Dutton said on Wednesday. **Canada aims to send eight armoured vehicles** "as quickly as possible", minister of defence Anita Anand announced.
- **The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, travelled to Moscow** and, in a joint press conference with Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, Guterres said the UN was "ready to fully mobilise its human and logistical resources to help save lives in Mariupol". Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereschuk, said there was "no point" in the UN if there was no real humanitarian corridor from Mariupol. Guterres also met **Russian president [Vladimir Putin](#) who described the situation in the besieged city of Mariupol as "tragic" and "complicated"**. Moscow and Kyiv were continuing talks online, Putin said.
- **Russia has dismissed Ukraine's proposal to stage peace talks in Mariupol**. Lavrov said it was too early to talk about who would mediate in any negotiations, but [he said Moscow was committed to a diplomatic solution via talks on Ukraine](#).
- **The head of the UN's atomic watchdog has condemned the Russian occupation of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, describing it as "very, very dangerous"**. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general, [Rafael Grossi, is heading an expert mission there](#) to "deliver equipment, conduct radiological assessments and restore safeguards monitoring systems".
- **Zelenskiy said "no one in the world can feel safe" after Russia threatened Ukraine's nuclear facilities** and called for "global control" over Russia's nuclear facilities and nuclear technology after meeting with director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael

	<p>Mariano Grossi. “No other country in the world since 1986 has posed such a major threat to nuclear security, to Europe and the world” he said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British prime minister Boris Johnson said he does not expect Putin to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Johnson said Putin “has a lot of room for manoeuvre” and could back down.
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HEADLINE	04/26 Russia shelled humanitarian corridor
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/russia-accused-of-shelling-mariupol-humanitarian-corridor
GIST	<p>Russia has stepped up attempts to encircle defending forces in the east of Ukraine and stood accused of shelling a humanitarian corridor out of Mariupol, as the US vowed to move “heaven and earth” to help Ukraine win the war.</p> <p>Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity in Moscow and Germany, a fresh wave of civilian deaths were reported across eastern Ukraine as Vladimir Putin’s forces escalated their barrage of key targets on Tuesday and appeared to renege once again on giving safe passage to women and children.</p> <p>Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, the besieged port city on the Sea of Azov where the remaining Ukrainian forces and civilians have been hiding out in a steel works, said the latest attempt to get people out had failed.</p> <p>Andryushchenko claimed that agreement on a humanitarian corridor out of the Azovstal steelworks had proven to be a “trap”, with Russian forces firing their artillery on the exit zone just moments after announcing through loudspeakers that a green corridor had been opened.</p> <p>Last week, Putin had ordered his troops not to storm the steel mill, but to seal it off so that “not even a fly comes through”. There are an estimated 1,000 Ukrainian soldiers in the complex, along with many of their families.</p> <p>Andryushchenko said that over the past 24 hours, there had been 35 airstrikes against the Azovstal plant, with one strike causing a fire to break out in one of the workshops where civilians had been hiding, leaving some under rubble.</p> <p>Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, meeting the UN secretary general in Moscow, dismissed Ukraine’s proposal to stage peace talks in the port city, saying it was a “theatrical gesture” and “they probably wanted another heartrending scene”.</p> <p>Russia’s apparent flouting of the agreement for a humanitarian rescue of civilians trapped in Mariupol came amid increased efforts to push on in the east of Ukraine.</p> <p>Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of the Donetsk region, reported that two people had been killed and six others wounded as “Russians continue to deliberately fire at civilians and to destroy critical infrastructure”.</p> <p>In the neighbouring region of Luhansk, the governor, Serhiy Haidai, said three people had died after Russian shells hit a residential building in the city of Popasna, which Russian forces have been trying to capture.</p> <p>There were also reports of damage to an important bridge across the Dniester estuary linking the strategically vital region of Bessarabia to the rest of the country.</p> <p>Should Ukrainian forces leave Bessarabia for fear of being cut off it could become a staging post for an attack on the Black Sea city of Odesa.</p> <p>Russia has refocused its operations in Ukraine in recent weeks away from storming the capital, Kyiv, in the north and towards creating a Kremlin-controlled region stretching across the east and south of Ukraine.</p>

	<p>At the US Ramstein airbase in Germany, Joe Biden’s defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, attending a meeting of officials from about 40 countries, pledged more weapons to foil Putin, while Germany announced it had cleared the way for delivery of Gepard anti-aircraft guns to Ukraine.</p> <p>Austin said he wanted to find a “common and transparent understanding of Ukraine’s near-term security requirements because we’re going to keep moving heaven and earth so that we can meet them”.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the head of the UN’s atomic watchdog has condemned the Russian occupation of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, describing the situation as “absolutely abnormal and very, very dangerous”.</p> <p>Rafael Grossi, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general, spoke to reporters as he arrived at the site of the former nuclear power plant, which was occupied by Russian troops for several weeks.</p> <p>Grossi was heading an expert mission to Chernobyl to “deliver equipment, conduct radiological assessments and restore safeguards monitoring systems”, the IAEA said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 WHO: dramatic testing drop, ‘blind’ on virus
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/26/lack-of-covid-testing-leaves-researches-blind-to-evolution-patterns-who-warns
GIST	<p>A dramatic drop in testing for Covid-19 has left the world blind to the virus’s continuing rampage and its potentially dangerous mutations, the head of the World Health Organization has warned.</p> <p>The UN health agency said that reported Covid cases and deaths had been dropping dramatically. “Last week, just over 15,000 deaths were reported to WHO – the lowest weekly total since March 2020,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.</p> <p>While saying this was “a very welcome trend”, he warned that the declining numbers could also be a result of significant cuts in testing for the virus.</p> <p>“As many countries reduce testing, WHO is receiving less and less information about transmission and sequencing,” he said. “This makes us increasingly blind to patterns of transmission and evolution.</p> <p>“When it comes to a deadly virus, ignorance is not bliss.”</p> <p>William Rodriguez, who heads the global diagnostics alliance FIND, also decried that many governments in recent months simply stopped looking for Covid cases.</p> <p>Speaking at the press conference hosted by WHO, he pointed out that in the past four months, amid surging Covid cases from the Omicron variant, “testing rates have plummeted by 70% to 90% worldwide”.</p> <p>The plunging testing rates came despite the fact that there is now more access to accurate testing than ever before.</p> <p>“We have an unprecedented ability to know what is happening,” Rodriguez said. “And yet today, because testing has been the first casualty of a global decision to let down our guard, we’re becoming blind to what is happening with this virus.”</p> <p>The Covid-19 pandemic has officially caused more than 6 million deaths since the virus first surfaced in China in late 2019, but the true toll is believed to be at least three times that high.</p> <p>While many countries have been removing measures and trying to move back to a semblance of normality, the WHO stresses that the pandemic is still not over.</p>

	<p>“This virus won’t go away just because countries stop looking for it,” Tedros said. “It is still spreading, it is still changing, and it is still killing.”</p> <p>He cautioned that “the threat of a dangerous new variant remains very real”.</p> <p>“And although deaths are declining, we still don’t understand the long-term consequences of infection in those who survive.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 JBLM soldier killed during YTC exercise
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/military/article260781172.html
GIST	<p>A soldier from Joint Base Lewis-McChord was killed Monday during a training exercise at the Yakima Training Center, the military base said in a news release Tuesday. Two other soldiers sustained minor injuries.</p> <p>U.S. Army Pfc. Joseph A. Marquez, 20, died in a single-vehicle incident. The soldier was from Delaware and was a member of the 2-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team in the 7th Infantry Division.</p> <p>JBLM’s Division of Public Affairs did not disclose details of the incident. In its news release, the public affairs office said Marquez’s death was an accident. Yakima Training Center is a 327,000-acre training location in Yakima County.</p> <p>“We are deeply saddened by the loss of Pfc. Marquez,” Lt. Col. Michael Filanowski said in the release. “Blackhawk Squadron sends its deepest condolences to his family and loved ones. Our prayers and thoughts are with them during this difficult time.”</p> <p>Marquez joined the Army in 2021, according to a Facebook post from the 2-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team.</p> <p>The soldiers who were injured were evacuated to Yakima Memorial Hospital, where they were treated and released.</p> <p>What caused the fatal incident is being investigated, according to the news release.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Redmond settles wrongful-death claim
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/redmond-city-council-approves-7-5m-settlement-to-family-of-woman-killed-by-police-in-2020/
GIST	<p>The Redmond City Council Tuesday night voted to pay \$7.5 million to settle a wrongful-death claim made by the family of a woman who was shot to death in 2020 by a police officer as she lay unarmed and awaiting arrest outside her apartment door.</p> <p>Kim Zak, an attorney for the family of Andrea Churna, said the money will go to her estate, her parents and her 8-year-old son.</p> <p>“While no amount of money will bring Andrea back, the settlement does send a clear message that the Redmond Police Department made some serious errors in the way they handled Andrea’s call for help as well as highlights necessary change in their hiring and training practices,” Zak said.</p> <p>She said the settlement is believed to be the largest ever paid in Washington before an actual lawsuit was filed.</p>

Churna, 39, had called police seeking help because she believed someone was in her home the night of Sept. 20, 2020. She had been ordered out of her apartment and was prone on the floor waiting for officers to handcuff her when Officer Daniel Mendoza — [who had been fired by the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office for poor performance](#) — shot her six times with a high-powered rifle from a distance of about 30 feet.

There were at least a half-dozen officers in the hallway when the shooting occurred, according to an investigation.

Churna came from a law enforcement family and her father, a retired commander and 32-year veteran of the Michigan State Police, said his daughter had called police for help and was obeying their commands when she was killed.

Churna had a handgun in her apartment at the Moderna Apartments in Redmond and had fired a shot into the door before calling police for help. Churna initially left her apartment carrying the gun and two officers fired at her, but missed.

According to statements, Churna went back into the apartment, put the gun down, and then exited with her hands up, wearing a T-shirt and yoga pants. Officers on the scene acknowledged she was not armed.

Investigators later found the handgun on the apartment patio. It had jammed and was inoperable, according to a King County sheriff's investigation.

Police ordered Churna to the ground and were coming up with an arrest plan when Mendoza opened fire with a .223 caliber semi-automatic rifle as she was "proned out" but squirming on the floor, asking to speak to her ex-husband.

Mendoza, 26, had been dismissed as a probationary Whatcom County sheriff's deputy 14 months earlier for poor performance, according to the investigation records.

Those records showed that Mendoza struggled with virtually every aspect of police work during his seven months as a probationary sheriff's deputy, unable to recite statutes, routinely getting lost while responding to calls, writing muddled reports and failing tests on topics ranging from appropriate use of force to the county's pursuit policies.

The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office reviewed the shooting and declined to file criminal charges pending an inquest, which has not yet been scheduled. Redmond Police Chief Darrell Lowe has hired Force Science Institution, an outside company with a history of favoring police officers, to conduct an internal investigation.

Mendoza remains on patrol as a Redmond police officer, Zak, the attorney, said in a statement.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle extends Covid rent payment plan
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-city-council-extends-covid-rent-payment-plan-requirement-beyond-civil-emergency/
GIST	<p>Seattle renters will be entitled to "reasonable" repayment plans for unpaid rent built up during the pandemic for six months after the city's civil emergency order expires.</p> <p>The Seattle City Council voted 7-1 on Tuesday to extend protections for tenants who owe unpaid rent, amending previous protections to require that landlords offer tenants a "reasonable" amount of time to repay past-due rent.</p> <p>In May 2020 the council approved an ordinance that required landlords to offer three- to six-month repayment plans to tenants who accumulate unpaid rent during the pandemic. The new action requires</p>

landlords to offer “reasonable” repayment plans, with monthly installments that do not exceed one-third of a tenant’s monthly rent, for rental debts incurred during or up to six months after the end of the city’s civil emergency order.

Councilmember Dan Strauss, who sponsored the bill, said Tuesday the change is necessary due to the unexpected length of the pandemic.

“At that time we believed that the pandemic would first only last two weeks, and then two months, and we definitely did not foresee it lasting two years or more,” Strauss said. “We did know then, when everything was shut and many people’s line of work froze, that people needed time to address the debt incurred during that close-down.”

Strauss described the bill as a “technical correction” that would bring the city’s rule closer to the [state Legislature’s 2021 payment plan requirement](#).

Multiple property owners and advocates called the council to object to the amendment, claiming the change would confuse and financially burden local landlords.

“This is unnecessary, confusing and will leave Seattle housing providers guessing which state or city laws apply to them, making it more difficult to ensure they are fully in compliance with city and state law,” Daniel Bannon, a representative of the Rental Housing Association of Washington said, asking the council to amend the ordinance to end at the same time as the state’s civil emergency order.

“We must prevent further isolation of Seattle’s rental housing policy that is forcing small housing providers out of the city at unprecedented rates,” he added.

Strauss said the new policy was the best option for both property owners and tenants behind on rent.

“The bill before us today helps us ensure that landlords are made whole and tenants have a reasonable time to repay their debt,” Strauss said. “The tenant does remain responsible for repaying any and all debt they’ve incurred.”

Councilmember Sara Nelson, the sole vote against the bill, said she fears that allowing renters more time to pay back debts could harm small and independent landlords.

“The bottom line is that I am concerned about losing rental housing stock, particularly that of small landlords who had less resources to weather the eviction moratorium, and unpaid rent that is ongoing,” Nelson said.

Nelson noted that the council bill is tied to the city’s March 2020 civil emergency, which is still in place, rather than the state’s legislation and which, unlike the state protection, also extends to debts incurred up to six months after the end of the state of emergency.

The amendment passed 7-1 with Nelson opposing; Councilmember Kshama Sawant absent; and Councilmembers Strauss, Lisa Herbold, Andrew Lewis, Tammy Morales and Teresa Mosqueda and Council President Deborah Juarez voting in favor.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Covid czar: not seeking stop every infection
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/us/politics/covid-infections-ashish-jha.html
GIST	Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House’s new COVID-19 coordinator, said Tuesday that as the United States sees an increase in known coronavirus cases and keeps a watchful eye for new variants, the administration was not seeking to stop every infection.

Making his first appearance at a White House news briefing since he assumed the role earlier this month, Jha cited the relatively low number of new deaths — though around 300 a day were “still too high,” he added — and hospitalizations at their lowest point in the pandemic. Those tallies, set against the rising number of cases around the country, amounted to a promising “inflection,” he said.

Asked what Americans should make of high-profile people such as Vice President Kamala Harris testing positive for the virus, Jha said that with such a contagious virus spreading, it would be “hard to ensure that no one gets COVID in America.”

“That’s not even a policy goal,” he said. “The goal of our policy should be: obviously minimize infections whenever possible but to make sure people don’t get seriously ill.”

The average number of confirmed new cases a day in the United States — more than 49,000 daily as of Monday, according to a New York Times database — is comparable to levels last seen in late July, even as cases have risen by more than 50% over the past two weeks, a trend infectious disease experts have attributed to new omicron subvariants.

Jha warned that “we are going to see cases go up and go down during this pandemic as we head into the weeks, months and years ahead.” The more important reflections of progress, he said, would be whether health care systems are strained and whether people are hospitalized with and dying from COVID-19.

Since the arrival of omicron in the United States, other top federal health officials have made similar arguments. Dr. Janet Woodcock, then the acting Food and Drug Administration commissioner, told lawmakers in January that infections for many people were inevitable.

“It’s hard to process what’s actually happening right now, which is, most people are going to get COVID,” she said. “What we need to do is make sure the hospitals can still function, transportation, you know, other essential services are not disrupted while this happens.”

That thinking is codified in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recent changes to mask-wearing guidance, which uses COVID-related hospital admissions and the percentage of hospital beds occupied by COVID patients, in addition to virus case counts, as markers for whether certain communities can go without masks.

Around 15,000 people are in U.S. hospitals with the virus each day, similar to numbers from the earliest weeks of the pandemic. Jha on Tuesday pointed to the protection offered by vaccines and treatments, including Pfizer’s antiviral pill Paxlovid, which he said the administration was making a new push with to reach vulnerable Americans and doctors he said were too hesitant to prescribe the drug.

He also implored lawmakers to fund more of the federal COVID-19 response, as a relief package that would inject \$10 billion to the effort is stalled in the Senate. Jha displayed a graphic that showed other countries investing in more vaccines and medications, a clear suggestion that the United States was delinquent in prioritizing the same issues.

That relief package is not set to include what the White House had hoped would be billions more in funds for global COVID-19 response efforts, including the work of getting shots into arms.

“There are some people in this country who sometimes think that we can take a domestic-only approach to a global pandemic,” Jha said. “That’s not a thing. You can’t do that.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Leasing limit Alaska petroleum reserve
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/us-decides-to-limit-leasing-in-alaska-petroleum-reserve/

GIST	<p>JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — The U.S. Interior Department has issued a decision to limit roughly half the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska to oil and gas leasing, rolling back a Trump-era policy criticized by conservationists that would have vastly expanded lands available for potential development.</p> <p>The plan would prevent oil and gas development in areas considered important for sensitive bird populations and the Teshekpuk and Western Arctic caribou herds, the decision dated Monday states.</p> <p>Alaska’s U.S. senators criticized the decision as shortsighted and as closing off millions of acres to potential oil and gas activity. Some conservation groups said they saw as positive the new decision but want more action from the Biden administration in moving away from fossil fuels.</p> <p>The decision was signed by an Interior Department official and released following a recent visit to the state by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.</p> <p>The decision calls for management consistent with plans adopted during the Obama administration, while “including certain more protective lease stipulations and operating procedures for threatened and endangered species” from the Trump-era plan, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management said.</p> <p>The decision is in line with a position the land management agency earlier this year said it favored. The agency falls under the Interior Department.</p> <p>The reserve covers about 36,000 square miles (92,000 square kilometers) on Alaska’s North Slope. Under the decision, about 18,000 square miles (48,000 square kilometers) would be open to oil and gas leasing. That includes some lands closest to existing leases centered on the Greater Mooses Tooth and Bear Tooth units and the Umiat field, the decision states.</p> <p>New infrastructure would be prohibited on about 13,000 square miles (34,000 square kilometers), it states.</p> <p>Plans advanced during the Trump administration would have allowed for oil and gas leasing on about 29,000 square miles (75,000 square kilometers).</p> <p>Alaska U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski called the new decision a bad one.</p> <p>“It is simply shocking that the Biden administration can look at the world and decide that Alaska is where ‘keep it in the ground’ should apply,” Murkowski said in a statement.</p> <p>President Joe Biden at the start of his term last year directed officials to review and respond to agency actions under the prior administration that were deemed in conflict with policies Biden set out around the environment, public health and climate change. The decision is an extension of that process.</p> <p>Conservationists had argued the plan advanced during the Trump administration was too extensive. Kristen Miller, conservation director with the Alaska Wilderness League, said the new decision is “the right move in the near term.” But Miller said there’s more to be done.</p> <p>“World events have predictably led to industry lobbyists and the lawmakers they bankroll calling for new domestic oil and gas leasing and production, especially in Arctic Alaska, and in the name of ‘energy security,’” Miller said in a statement. “In reality, the answer to energy security does not lie beneath the thawing Arctic permafrost but in accelerating the shift to clean, renewable sources of power generation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Russia Chernobyl seizure risked accident
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/nuclear-chief-russias-chernobyl-seizure-risked-accident/
GIST	CHERNOBYL, Ukraine (AP) — Thirty-six years after the world’s worst nuclear disaster, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Tuesday that Russian troops risked causing an accident with their “very, very dangerous” seizure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

Standing under an umbrella during a rain shower outside the damaged plant, agency Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi said that while radiation levels are normal, the situation is still “not stable.” Nuclear authorities have to “keep on alert.”

Russian troops moved into the radiation-contaminated Chernobyl exclusion zone in February on their way toward the Ukrainian capital. They withdrew late last month as Russia pulled its forces from areas near Kyiv and switched its focus to fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The site has been back in Ukrainian hands since then, and disrupted communications have been restored.

Ukrainian officials have said the Russian occupiers held plant workers at gunpoint during a marathon shift of more than a month, with employees sleeping on tabletops and eating just twice a day.

Grossi congratulated the workers on mitigating potential risks during the occupation, including power disruptions.

“I don’t know if we were very close to disaster, but the situation was absolutely abnormal and very, very dangerous,” he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, noting the Chernobyl anniversary on Twitter, said that “not everyone realized” the dangers of nuclear energy.

“Now Russia’s actions at Ukrainian nuclear power plants threaten humanity with a new catastrophe.”

An April 26, 1986, explosion and fire at Chernobyl sent radioactive material into the atmosphere, and the plant became a symbol of the Soviet Union’s stumbling final years. The international community, including Russia, spent billions to stabilize and secure the area.

The unit where the explosion and fire took place was sheathed in a state-of-art encasement. The dangers at the plant are ongoing, however, because spent nuclear fuel rods require round-the-clock maintenance. The fuel is from the plant’s four reactors, all now shut down.

Russian forces continue to hold a working nuclear power plant, Europe’s largest, in southern Ukraine. Fighting damaged the training facility of the Zaporizhzhia plant in early March.

Zelenskyy said in a Kyiv news conference with Grossi that peacekeepers should be sent to protect the Zaporizhzhia plant because “the risk of disaster exists also from missiles launched from Russia which fly over nuclear plants.”

In his nightly video address to his nation, Zelenskyy added that Russian forces had fired missiles just over Zaporizhzhia and two other Ukrainian nuclear power plants on Tuesday, and called for international control over Russian nuclear technology and facilities.

An Associated Press reporter who visited Chernobyl this month saw evidence that Russian soldiers dug trenches in the forested Chernobyl exclusion zone in the earliest hours of the invasion, churning up highly contaminated soil.

IAEA team members who were at the site Tuesday to make repairs and do assessments carried black suitcases from their vans into Chernobyl’s buildings. They were bringing dosimeters and other radiation monitoring equipment, Grossi said.

“There is a lot of work to be done after the occupation of this plant,” he said. “We have to do some repair work so we can restore the connectivity that we have with Vienna, so we can provide good information to the Ukrainian people, to the rest of the world.”

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the world’s nuclear watchdog, is based in Austria’s capital.

	<p>During the Russian occupation, Chernobyl lost its normal electricity supply. Plant workers relied on diesel generators to support the critical work of circulating water to cool the spent nuclear fuel.</p> <p>Asked whether the dangers posed by the Russian occupation were similar to the ones following the original Chernobyl accident, Grossi replied: “On that occasion, you had an explosion, you had an operating reactor. The situation was completely different. In this case, what we had was a nuclear safety situation which was not normal, that could have developed into an accident.”</p> <p>Responding to public concerns about the risks of nuclear power during wars, Grossi told reporters the problem was “not nuclear energy. The problem is the war.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Spokane firm loses Pierce Co. contract
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/company-loses-covid-testing-contract-pierce-county/281-e232908d-7ea8-40ad-b517-50f1bf772adf
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — A company lost its contract working for the COVID-19 testing program in Pierce County after complaints over slow test results and a questionable history exposed by the KING 5 Investigators.</p> <p>A Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD) spokesperson said the department is no longer working with Spokane-based Honu Management, which handled the online registration system and lab services contracts for several of the county’s public testing sites.</p> <p>Complaints about Honu’s test turnaround times began soon after the company started working with the county in January.</p> <p>“Why go? You don’t get results. Use someplace else,” one patient, who was tested at the Washington State Fairgrounds in Puyallup in January, wrote on the health department’s Facebook page.</p> <p>“Six days and no results,” another frustrated patient said.</p> <p>Perrin Walker was one of the people who waited in long lines at the fairgrounds’ “bronze lot” to get tested. He started browsing comments when he didn’t receive results after six days.</p> <p>“Some people had been waiting 10 days and still hadn’t heard anything back. So, I got a little bit more concerned,” Walker said.</p> <p>His call to the testing company went straight to voicemail. That’s when he first heard the name Honu Management.</p> <p>“I remember something from KING 5 about that company,” Walker said.</p> <p>Some Facebook commenters started posting a link to a 2020 KING 5 story about Honu Management. The story reported that Dallas County, Texas suspended its contract with the Spokane company after it failed to meet the required deadlines for returning test results. The county claimed that Honu overstated its ability to provide test results.</p> <p>The county also learned some of Honu’s company officers were exposed in another KING 5 investigation from 2019. In that story, a man named Devin Thornton was accused of running a “kickback scheme,” according to hundreds of pages of documents from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).</p> <p>The DOH documents state that Thornton operated DA Medical Group, which solicited local doctors for the alleged scheme. Doctors overprescribed medications for patients and billed the charges to insurance</p>

companies, the documents state. The state investigation found that DA Medical and the doctors split the profits from the inflated insurance payments.

In 2019, lawyers for several of the doctors denied any wrongdoing. Thornton and DA Medical Group never responded to KING 5's request for comment. More than five years after the investigation was initiated, DOH said the Podiatric Medical Board – which disciplines doctors –has not ruled on the case.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, records show that Devin Thornton and other officers from DA Medical Group founded Honu Management in the same small Spokane office. Honu began seeking publicly-funded testing contracts in the emerging world of COVID-19, stating the company could setup operations and deliver results faster than competitive bidders.

Honu won tens of millions of dollars in public contracts to manage COVID testing operations in Michigan, Texas, and Mississippi, among other places.

As complaints against Honu mounted in Texas, Dallas Morning News reporter Holly Hacker started researching the company's officers and found KING 5's 2019 story on Devin Thornton and DA Medical. Though Thornton has never responded to KING 5, he did speak with Hacker.

"Devin Thornton told us there was no kickback scheme and that his company was performing legitimate work for these other companies they work with and that it was someone else's wrongdoing," Hacker said.

However, after the Dallas Morning News articles were published, Dallas County cancelled its contract with Honu Management.

Perrin Walker, the Tacoma man who waited six days for his test results from Honu, wonders how Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department missed the red flags from all the news coverage on Honu.

"They should properly vet the companies they are selecting," Walker said.

A DOH spokesperson said Honu was a subcontractor hired by the primary contractor that the county chose to run the COVID testing program, [LTS Emergency Response](#) of Virginia.

"We did not perform a background check for Honu Management. We contracted with LTS for testing. LTS subcontracted with Honu for (testing) registration (and other services)," said TPCHD spokesperson Kenny Via.

"LTS no longer subcontracts with Honu for any of its work in Pierce County," Via said.

Via declined requests for on-camera interviews.

Emails show that health department officials were in direct contract with Honu and Devin Thornton. They did not vet the company until they received questions from citizens and KING 5 in January. Even then, the health department balked at acting.

"We are happy with Honu's daily reporting of registration data," Deputy Director Cindan Gizzi wrote in a January 10 email obtained by the KING 5 Investigators through a public records request. "We will allow LTS to continue to subcontract with Honu."

Emails show that two days later, that decision was overruled.

"We met with LTS to discuss Honu's involvement in the testing process and request a new subcontractor. LTS began using different tests with faster processing times and brought in a new subcontractor for registration," Via said.

Thornton and LTS did not respond to KING 5's requests for interviews.

	<p>Though Thornton's name appears throughout the 1,500 pages of documents from the 2017 "kickback" investigation, the state department of health said Thornton and DA Medical are not the targets of that years-long probe.</p> <p>The DOH said it can only investigate state-licensed facilities and healthcare professionals. It is focused on the licensed doctors in that alleged kickback scheme, not Thornton who does not have a medical license.</p> <p>That leaves Thornton and Honu Management free to continue pursuing multi-million dollar public contracts regardless of the outcome of the DOH case.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Renton middle school reinstates masks
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/renton/renton-middle-school-bringing-back-masks/281-54c601a1-25c8-449d-ae63-222991df50c3
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. — A middle school in the Renton School District is bringing back a universal masking requirement in response to an uptick in COVID-19 cases.</p> <p>Dimmitt Middle School has seen 38 COVID-19 cases in the month of April. There are 645 students total at the school.</p> <p>Public Health - Seattle King County recommended requiring universal masking of all students and staff at the school, according to a message from the district. The requirement will begin on Wednesday, April 27. Families will be notified when masks become optional again.</p> <p>There are no other schools in the district impacted by the mandate.</p> <p>In general, King County has seen an uptick in COVID-19 cases in the month of April. The county's transmission level is now "medium" per guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).</p> <p>The CDC's transmission level guidance, which was released back in late February, rates counties across the nation based on three transmission levels: low, medium and high.</p> <p>On Monday, King County entered the medium transmission level because there are more than 200 new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents over the last seven days.</p> <p>Although cases have been increasing, the burden on King County hospitals from COVID-19 has been relatively low recently.</p> <p>Bremerton High School is also been impacted by COVID-19 illnesses. The school is shifting to online learning for Thursday, April 28 and Friday, April 29 due to an increase in staff absences "for a variety of illnesses, including COVID," according to a message from the Bremerton School District.</p> <p>The school will be back in person on Monday, May 2.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Bremerton high school remote learning
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/bremerton-high-school-making-temporary-switch-remote-learning-due-staffing-shortage/DWHCIXMEI5DNJLAOYJPTOZ6FT4/
GIST	<p>BREMERTON, Wash. — Bremerton High School will be transitioning to virtual learning on Thursday and Friday of this week due to staffing shortages, the district announced Tuesday.</p>

	<p>The district says there is an increase in staff absences at the school due to a variety of illnesses, including COVID-19.</p> <p>As the district is also experiencing a substitute teacher shortage, it does not have adequate staffing to be able to teach all classes in-person, despite BHS and district office staff stepping in to help cover classes.</p> <p>While the district plans to resume in-person learning at BHS on Monday, it will evaluate staffing levels at the school on Sunday and provide families with an update by 8 p.m.</p> <p>All other schools in the district will continue with in-person learning.</p>
Return to Top	For more details, visit the Bremerton School District website .

HEADLINE	04/26 Investigation: cruise ship Covid outbreaks
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/ruby-princess-cruise-ship-under-investigation-after-multiple-large-covid-19-outbreaks
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO - A ship with Princess Cruises docked in California again after more passengers tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>The ship, the Ruby Princess, reported 37 cases for an April 23 trip. San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) officials say ships leaving the city must have a vaccine rate of 95 percent for crews and passengers to disembark.</p> <p>This trip had a 100 percent vaccine rate for the crew, passengers were at 99 percent, according to SFDPH. However, cases are still popping up. The 37 cases counted for the recent trip was more than tripled just 12 days before.</p> <p>San Francisco officials confirmed with KOMO News it received 143 reported cases on the same ship for an April 11 trip.</p> <p>Just one of these cases was hospitalized.</p> <p>“Only one person on the April 11 trip was hospitalized, which speaks to the incredible efficacy of vaccination,” a city spokesperson said.</p> <p>Those who tested positive are said to have had little to no symptoms.</p> <p>City officials say another trip for the boat, on March 27, resulted in 73 positive results. The large number of infections since the start of the cruising season caused the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch an investigation and place the Ruby Princess under observation, according to the CDC website.</p> <p>The ship's latest tour to Alaska took it through Seattle on Tuesday. Princess Cruises, which is part of a larger group called Carnival Corporation, has a memoranda of understanding with local public health officials as well as the Port of Seattle to abide by a series of safety protocols.</p> <p>In addition to maintaining the high vaccination rate among passengers and crew, Princess Cruises has agreed to have people quarantine aboard the ship when they do test positive for COVID-19. The company has also taken steps to pre-arrange for medical services when hospitalization is needed, so as to not strain the local resources when the ship pulls into port.</p> <p>At the request of KOMO News, Princess Cruises sent a statement regarding the string of cases on board Ruby Princess:</p> <p><i>As with all Princess itineraries, this cruise is operated as a highly vaccinated cruise, as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 95% of the guests are vaccinated with crew vaccination rates are at 100%.</i></p>

During the cruise some positive COVID-19 cases amongst our guests and crew members were identified. All cases are asymptomatic or only mildly symptomatic. Guests and crew who tested positive are isolated while monitored and cared for by our shipboard Medical team.

The protocols that have been established work. Because those established cruise health protocols work, there have been no outbreaks on board. In the occasions when cases are identified because of the testing onboard, these protocols help to maximize onboard containment with rapid response procedures designed to safeguard all other guests and crew as well as the communities our ships visit.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Spokane Bloomsday: police significant role
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/entertainment/events/organizers-precautions-bloomsday/293-05380a01-e3d9-49a4-814f-586aef9b5803
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — In just a few days, streets will shut down and thousands of runners and walkers will cram together at the Bloomsday start line.</p> <p>Spokane is hosting the first in-person Bloomsday since the pandemic started, and police play a significant role in keeping everyone safe.</p> <p>"This is a celebration of spring and a beginning of our fitness year and our outside stuff," retired Spokane police detective Al Odenthal said.</p> <p>Odenthal is on the Bloomsday board of directors and is in charge of security.</p> <p>"There is no indications coming from law enforcement or elsewhere that would indicate Bloomsday in any way is a target of any group or individual," Odenthal said.</p> <p>Still, law enforcement has to be ready to respond to any and all emergencies.</p> <p>"Our concern for safety and security is where we have big concentrations of people where you could have a mass casualty event," Odenthal said. "The start and the finish line are two of those things. Several years ago we had the Tsarnaev brothers in Boston and it was like three weeks before Bloomsday."</p> <p>Just like previous years, backpacks are not allowed in congested areas close to the start and finish line. The rule does not apply for participants in the final start group, who often have strollers and small children with them.</p> <p>"If you are on the race course you have to have your bib attached and showing, plainly visible to people who are running the course," Spokane Police Sgt. Teresa Fuller said.</p> <p>Fuller said officers and barricades will be set up to make sure no vehicles end up on the course accidentally or intentionally.</p> <p>"We want to make sure it's a safe event for everybody," Fuller said.</p> <p>Organizers are even trying to keep pets safe. If you have a dog, don't bring it to Bloomsday.</p> <p>"Even if you've got a trained service dog we'd prefer you call us, we'll get a human to go with you," Odenthal said. Dogs can be trampled in the crowd or runners.</p> <p>Police are asking participants and spectators to keep an eye out for anything unusual.</p>

"We will have a marked presence on the course and like I said if anybody sees anything that's suspicious or need to point out to officers or sees something that might be a safety issue even, let one of our officers or volunteers know," Fuller said.

All that security comes at a cost. During the last in-person Bloomsday in 2019, Spokane police racked up about \$61,000 in overtime. Traditionally, Bloomsday would reimburse the city 60% of the cost. However, this year, the city is covering the bill to help organizations like Bloomsday and Hoopfest, which have lost money during the pandemic.

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HEADLINE	04/26 SPD chief: 911 response times hindered
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-911-response-times-hindered-by-staffing-crisis-officials-say
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Police chief Adrian Diaz blames Seattle Police's slow 911 response times on the ongoing staffing crisis affecting his department. Efforts to beef up incentives and retention bonuses through the city council have largely floundered.</p> <p>Diaz told members of the City Council's Public Safety Committee on Tuesday that neighboring police agencies are poaching officers with better incentives that he cannot offer.</p> <p>So far this year, 43 officers have separated from the police department and only 13 have been hired.</p> <p>SPD is lowering its projection hiring of 125 officers in 2022 down to 98, while it estimates 125 officers will leave by year's end.</p> <p>"Number one: officers want to be valued, they want to feel appreciated, and they are also thinking about their own health and wellbeing," Diaz told council members.</p> <p>He told the council how he's had to move more people to patrol to lower 911 call-response times, and those patrol officers are burning out, working lots of overtime just to handle the bare minimum of calls.</p> <p>"As crime goes up, and they are having to respond to call, to call, to call and not getting much downtime, that puts a huge level of stress on them," said Diaz. "They can go to another agency that's experiencing less of that violence, less of those crimes and less call response and interacting with the community more, and that helps them with their own mental state."</p> <p>But the meeting went beyond the scope of what committee chair Lisa Herbold had intended—it turned into a debate on whether incentives work and if nearly \$4.5 million in predicted salary savings could go elsewhere.</p> <p>The Seattle City Council again considered retention bonuses for police officers during their Tuesday public safety committee meeting.</p> <p>"Our revenues are not matching our general fund spending," said council member Teresa Mosqueda. "That money could be used next year".</p> <p>She also cited a University of Washington professor who shared a study during a previous committee meeting.</p> <p>"The 2021 study found that 49% of all of our 911 calls—which constitute 80% of the call volume—could be responded to by an alternative responder, not a sworn officer," she said.</p> <p>But when council member Alex Pederson asked Greg Doss, a council staff member, if the city had an alternative police response in place, the answer was no.</p>

Talk of alternatives of a sworn officer response to 911 calls accelerated after the death of George Floyd and the protests that followed in 2020. However, there has been no alternative 911 response in place other than Health One, operated by the Seattle Fire Department for behavior health issue calls.

"I think all of us can agree that we do have a hiring crisis at the Seattle Police Department," said council member Andrew Lewis.

Diaz told the county that priority one 911 calls, the most urgent calls where a person's physical wellbeing could be in danger, have risen.

"Our priority two calls have gone up and actually exceed 30 minutes, and our priority three calls is almost over an hour," Diaz said. "Even when people do need 911 services, we are not able to respond in an adequate amount of time."

"We are clearly dealing with a public safety emergency, we don't have enough officers on the street to deal with it," said council member Sara Nelson, who is sponsoring a resolution that calls for the mayor to draft a plan to offer incentives to retain and hire more officers.

"Are we happy with the status quo? Are we fine not doing anything? I'm not," said Nelson.

Herbold is sponsoring a resolution to set aside \$625,000 for moving expenses for newly-hired officers.

As committee chairperson, Herbold has the prerogative to call for a vote on the measures. Before the meeting even started, she said the committee would not vote on either her proposal or Nelson's.

The council may vote on the proposals on May 10. If Seattle Police's projections hold, two more officers could have separated from the department by that time.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Beijing enforces lockdowns, mass testing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/beijing-enforces-mass-covid-testing-closes-neighborhoods-84310868
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Police and new fencing restricted who could leave a locked-down area in Beijing on Tuesday as authorities in the Chinese capital stepped up efforts to prevent a major COVID-19 outbreak like the one that has all but shut down the city of Shanghai.</p> <p>People lined up for throat swabs across much of Beijing as mass testing was expanded to 11 of the city's 16 districts.</p> <p>Another 22 cases were found in the last 24 hours, Beijing health officials said at a late afternoon news conference, bringing the total to 92 since the outbreak was discovered five days ago. That is tiny in comparison to Shanghai, where the number of cases has topped 500,000 and at least 190 people have died. No deaths have been reported from the still-nascent outbreak in Beijing.</p> <p>An initial announcement of testing in one Beijing district had sparked panic buying in the city of 21 million on Monday, but the situation appeared to calm on Tuesday even as testing was expanded. Public transport appeared to be running largely normally and roads were filled with commuters.</p> <p>"I'm not worried that Beijing would suffer from a shortage of supplies so I don't plan to stock up," said Zhang Yifan, who was on his way to get tested in Dongcheng district. "Because if people stock up blindly, it may cause a waste of resources. If people keep too much supplies at home, it will cause a shortage."</p> <p>Beijing has locked down some apartment buildings and residential complexes and on Monday added a larger urban area measuring about 2 by 3 kilometers (1 by 2 miles). Workers put up blue metal fencing</p>

along part of the area Tuesday, and police restricted who could leave. Residents are being kept inside their compounds.

Fears of a total lockdown have been fed by disruptions in the supply of food, medicine and daily necessities in Shanghai, a southeast coast business hub whose 25 million residents have only gradually been allowed to leave their homes after three weeks of confinement.

However, 86-year-old Beijing resident Chen Shengzhen said the capital had been given more time to prepare than its southern cousin.

Shanghai's lockdown "came all of a sudden, so the policies and other aspects were not able to be in place," leading to short-term hardships in the city, Chen told The Associated Press.

"My daughter works in a government department and they have prepared very well, such as beds, quilts, and articles for women's use. Even if we need to go into lockdown, we will be fine," said Chen.

Shanghai residents, confined to their complexes or buildings, had trouble ordering food deliveries and also faced higher prices. The lockdown of China's largest city has had ripple effects elsewhere as goods have backed up at Shanghai's port, affecting factory production, global supply chains and China's own economic growth.

Zhong Xiaobing, the general manager of the Lianhua Supermarket chain in Shanghai, said that shipments of goods from elsewhere in China have gotten smoother since the government organized trucks 10 days ago to bring in goods from key transfer stations, but that imports remain slower because of port and other transport restrictions.

Other cities have also been locked down in China as the omicron variant proves difficult to control, with Baotou in Inner Mongolia the latest to enforce one.

Beijing tested nearly 3.8 million people in an initial round of mass testing in Chaoyang district on Monday. All the results were negative except for one in a group of five that were tested together, a Chaoyang official said. Those five people were being tested to determine who among them is infected.

Chaoyang has had the most cases in the Beijing outbreak, but authorities decided to extend the testing to 10 more districts on Tuesday.

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HEADLINE	04/27 DJI halts Russia, Ukraine drone business
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/dji-halts-russia-ukraine-business-prevent-drone-misuse-84339184
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Drone company DJI Technology Co has temporarily suspended business activities in Russia and Ukraine to prevent use of its drones in combat, in a rare case of a Chinese company pulling out of Russia because of the war.</p> <p>"DJI is internally reassessing compliance requirements in various jurisdictions. Pending the current review, DJI will temporarily suspend all business activities in Russia and Ukraine," the company said in a statement released Tuesday.</p> <p>Many Western brands and companies have withdrawn from the Russian market due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but Chinese firms have kept operating there. Beijing has refrained from publicly criticizing Russia over the war.</p> <p>Both Ukraine and Russia are thought to be using DJI drones in combat, even though the company maintains that its products are intended for civilian use.</p>

	<p>Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykhailo Federov wrote an open letter last month appealing to DJI to block sales of its drones in Russia, contending that Russian troops were using “DJI products in Ukraine in order to navigate their missiles to kill civilians.”</p> <p>The AeroScope system installed in DJI drones allows the detection and monitoring of other drones and their operators in the vicinity via special receivers. The worry is that Russians might be using the AeroScope system to attack Ukraine drone pilots.</p> <p>DJI has rejected claims that it leaked data on Ukraine’s military positions to Russia, after German retailer Mediamarkt cited Russia’s use of DJI drones in the war as a reason it removed the company's products from its shelves.</p> <p>Last week, DJI said in a statement that its drones are not marketed or sold for military use. It said it “unequivocally opposed attempts to attach weapons” to its products.</p> <p>“We will never accept any use of our products to cause harm, and we will continue striving to improve the world with our work,” the company said.</p> <p>Another Chinese business, ride hailing company Didi Global, reversed a decision to withdraw from Russia after it was blasted by members of the Chinese public for bowing to pressure from the West.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Sudan: Darfur tribal clashes over 200 dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/official-death-toll-latest-darfur-violence-now-200-84325677
GIST	<p>CAIRO -- The death toll from weekend tribal clashes between Arabs and non-Arabs in Sudan’s western Darfur region has surpassed 200 people, a senior official said Tuesday.</p> <p>Khamis Abdalla Abkar, the provincial governor of West Darfur province, said Sunday’s fighting in the town of Kreinik also wounded at least 103 others.</p> <p>He said attackers overwhelmed a joint security force in the town, leading to its withdrawal.</p> <p>“This is a crime, a crime against humanity,” Abkar said in video comments, adding that the town was destroyed, including its government institutions.</p> <p>The fighting, some of the deadliest in the region in recent years, grew out of the killing of two Arab herdsmen on Thursday just outside Kreinik, 80 kilometers (around 50 miles) east of Genena, the provincial capital of West Darfur.</p> <p>Large numbers of Arab militias, known as janjaweed, then stormed the town early Sunday with heavy weapons in retaliation, he said.</p> <p>The violence eventually reached West Darfur’s provincial capital of Genena on Sunday and the main hospital was attacked.</p> <p>Shooting took place inside the facility including its emergency department. One staffer was killed, and health care workers were evacuated, according to the Doctors Without Borders charity.</p> <p>Abkar, the provincial governor, also said that clashes on Thursday and Friday left eight dead and over two dozen wounded.</p> <p>Abkar said authorities have taken unprecedented security measures to protect civilians in West Darfur. The military, he said, deployed a brigade to the province joining a civilian protection force already stationed in Kreinik.</p>

	<p>Tensions between Arab and African Masalit communities in Kreinik date back to December when a property dispute at a local market triggered clashes that killed at least 88 people.</p> <p>The fighting has come at a critical time for Sudan, which has plunged into chaos since a military coup last year. The takeover upended the country's transition to democracy after a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.</p> <p>The clashes raise questions over whether military leaders are capable of bringing security to Darfur, which has been wracked by years of civil war. In 2020, the U.N. Security Council ended its peacekeeping mission there.</p> <p>The Darfur conflict began in 2003 when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination. Al-Bashir's government was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes and unleashing the janjaweed on civilians — a charge it denied.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Mexico: Covid now endemic not pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexico-coronavirus-now-endemic-pandemic-84326485
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- The Mexican government said Tuesday that COVID-19 has passed from a pandemic to an endemic stage in Mexico, meaning authorities will treat it as a seasonally recurring disease.</p> <p>Mexico never enforced face mask requirements, and the few partial shutdowns of businesses and activities were lifted weeks ago.</p> <p>“It is now retreating almost completely,” said President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.</p> <p>New case numbers have declined. But that may be because Mexico, which never did much testing, is now offering even fewer tests.</p> <p>Daily death rates have also dropped sharply.</p> <p>Mexico has recorded almost 325,000 test-confirmed deaths, but government reviews of death certificates suggest the real toll is almost 490,000.</p> <p>About 90% of adult Mexicans have received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Myanmar convicts ex-leader of corruption
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/myanmar-court-sentences-suu-kyi-years-corruption-84336828
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- A court in military-ruled Myanmar convicted the country's former leader Aung San Suu Kyi of corruption and sentenced her to five years in prison Wednesday in the first of several corruption cases against her.</p> <p>Suu Kyi, who was ousted by an army takeover last year, had denied the allegation that she had accepted gold and hundreds of thousands of dollars given her as a bribe by a top political colleague.</p> <p>Her supporters and independent legal experts consider her prosecution an unjust move to discredit Suu Kyi and legitimize the military's seizure of power while keeping the 76-year-old elected leader from returning to an active role in politics.</p> <p>The daughter of Aung San, Myanmar's founding father, Suu Kyi became a public figure in 1988 during a failed uprising against a previous military government when she helped found the National League for Democracy party. She spent 15 of the next 21 years under house arrest for leading a nonviolent struggle for democracy that earned her the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. When the army allowed an election in 2015,</p>

her party won a landslide victory and she became the de facto head of state. Her party won a greater majority in the 2020 polls.

She has already been sentenced to six years' imprisonment in other cases and faces 10 more corruption charges. The maximum punishment under the Anti-Corruption Act is 15 years in prison and a fine. Convictions in the other cases could bring sentences of more than 100 years in prison in total.

"These charges will not have credibility other than in the eyes of the junta's stacked courts (and the military's supporters)," said Moe Thuzar, a fellow at the Yusof Ishak Institute, a Southeast Asian studies center in Singapore. "Even if there were any legitimate concerns or complaints about corruption by any member of an elected government, a coup and enforced military rule are certainly not the way to pursue such concerns."

News of Wednesday's verdict came from a legal official who asked not to be identified because he is not authorized to release such information. Suu Kyi's trial in the capital, Naypyitaw, was closed to the media, diplomats and spectators, and her lawyers were barred from speaking to the press.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won a landslide victory in the 2020 general election, but lawmakers were not allowed to take their seats when the army seized power on Feb. 1, 2021, arresting Suu Kyi and many senior colleagues in her party and government. The army claimed it acted because there had been massive electoral fraud, but independent election observers didn't find any major irregularities.

The takeover was met with large nonviolent protests nationwide, which security forces quashed with lethal force that has so far led to the deaths of almost 1,800 civilians, according to a watchdog group, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

As repression escalated, armed resistance against the military government grew, and some U.N. experts now characterize the country as being in a state of civil war.

Suu Kyi has not been seen or allowed to speak in public since she was detained and is being held in an undisclosed location. However, at last week's final hearing in the case, she appeared to be in good health and asked her supporters to "stay united," said a legal official familiar with the proceedings who asked not to be named because he is not authorized to release information.

In earlier cases, Suu Kyi was sentenced to six years' imprisonment on convictions of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies, violating coronavirus restrictions and sedition.

In the case decided Wednesday, she was accused of receiving \$600,000 and seven gold bars in 2017-18 from Phyo Min Thein, the former chief minister of Yangon, the country's biggest city and a senior member of her political party. Her lawyers, before they were served with gag orders late last year, said she rejected all his testimony against her as "absurd."

The nine other cases currently being tried under the Anti-Corruption Act include several related to the purchase and rental of a helicopter by one of her former Cabinet ministers. Violations of the law carry a maximum penalty for each offense of 15 years in prison and a fine.

Suu Kyi is also charged with diverting money meant as charitable donations to build a residence, and with misusing her position to obtain rental properties at lower-than-market prices for a foundation named after her mother. The state Anti-Corruption Commission has declared that several of her alleged actions deprived the state of revenue it would otherwise have earned.

Another corruption charge alleging that she accepted a bribe has not yet gone to trial.

Suu Kyi is also being tried on a charge of violating the Official Secrets Act, which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years, and on a charge alleging election fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of three years.

	<p>“The days of Aung San Suu Kyi as a free woman are effectively over. Myanmar’s junta and the country’s kangaroo courts are walking in lockstep to put Aung San Suu Kyi away for what could ultimately be the equivalent of a life sentence, given her advanced age,” said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch. “Destroying popular democracy in Myanmar also means getting rid of Aung San Suu Kyi, and the junta is leaving nothing to chance.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Poland, Bulgaria: Russia cuts natural gas
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/polish-officials-russia-suspending-gas-supplies-rubles-84323178
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland -- Polish and Bulgarian officials said Tuesday that Moscow is cutting off natural gas deliveries to their countries due to their refusal to pay in Russian rubles, a demand made by President Vladimir Putin after sanctions were levied against his nation over the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian state-owned energy giant Gazprom informed the two EU and NATO member nations that gas supplies will be suspended starting Wednesday, their governments said.</p> <p>The suspensions would be the first since Putin's announcement last month that “unfriendly foreign buyers” would have to transact with Gazprom in rubles instead of dollars and euros. Only Hungary has agreed to do so, with other countries rejecting the demand as an unacceptable, one-sided breach of contracts and a violation of sanctions.</p> <p>If deliveries are halted to other countries as well, it could cause economic pain in Europe, driving natural gas prices up and possibly leading to rationing — but it would also deal a blow to Russia's own economy.</p> <p>Wednesday's cutoffs will affect deliveries of Russian gas to Poland through the Yamal-Europe pipeline, according to Polish state gas company PGNiG, and to Bulgaria via the TurkStream pipeline, that country's Energy Ministry said.</p> <p>The Yamal-Europe line carries gas from Russia to Poland and Germany, via Belarus. Poland has been receiving some 9 billion cubic meters annually, fulfilling some 45% of the country’s need.</p> <p>PGNiG said it was considering legal action over Moscow’s payment demand.</p> <p>But Climate Minister Anna Moskwa said Poland is prepared to make do after having worked to reduce its reliance on Russian energy sources. Several years ago the country opened its first terminal for liquefied natural gas, or LNG, in Swinoujscie, on the Baltic Sea coast, and later this year a pipeline from Norway is to become operational.</p> <p>“There will be no shortage of gas in Polish homes,” Moskwa tweeted.</p> <p>Analyst Emily McClain of Rystad Energy concurred, saying that Poland has ample natural gas in storage and has the capacity to ramp up imports.</p> <p>Bulgaria said it was working with state gas companies to find alternative sources and that no restrictions on domestic consumption would be imposed for now, even though the Balkan country of 6.5 million people meets over 90% of its gas needs with Russian imports.</p> <p>One feasible and relatively immediate option available to the Bulgarian government would be to increase their imports of Azeri gas.</p> <p>Poland has been a strong supporter of neighboring Ukraine during the Russian invasion and has acted as a transit point for weapons the United States and other Western nations have provided to Kyiv.</p>

	<p>Warsaw said this week that it, too, was sending weaponry to Ukraine's army, in the form of tanks. On Tuesday it announced sanctions targeting 50 Russian oligarchs and companies, including Gazprom.</p> <p>Bulgaria, once one of Moscow's closest allies, has cut many of its ties with Russia after a new, liberal government took the reins last fall and also in the wake of the invasion. It has supported sanctions against Russia and sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine.</p> <p>Bulgaria has been hesitant to provide military aid, but Prime Minister Kiril Petkov and members of his coalition government were expected in Kyiv on Wednesday for talks about further assistance.</p> <p>Europe buys large amounts of Russian natural gas for residential heating, electrical generation and the fuel industry, with Germany particularly dependent on it. The imports have continued despite the war.</p> <p>Around 60% of imports are paid in euros, and the rest in dollars. Putin's demand was apparently intended to help bolster the Russian currency against Western sanctions.</p> <p>In Washington, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. had been preparing for such a cutoff by Russia.</p> <p>"Some of that has been asking some countries in Asia who have excess supply to provide that to Europe," Psaki said. "We've done that in some cases, and it's been an ongoing effort."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Southern Calif. cuts water use to millions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/millions-cut-water-drought-stricken-california-84331732
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES -- Southern California's gigantic water supplier took the unprecedented step Tuesday of requiring about 6 million people to cut their outdoor watering to one day a week as drought continues to plague the state.</p> <p>The board of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California declared a water shortage emergency and required the cities and water agencies it supplies to implement the cutback on June 1 and enforce it or face hefty fines.</p> <p>"We don't have enough water supplies right now to meet normal demand. The water is not there," Metropolitan Water District spokesperson Rebecca Kimitch said. "This is unprecedented territory. We've never done anything like this before."</p> <p>The Metropolitan Water District uses water from the Colorado River and the State Water Project to supply 26 public water agencies, which provide it to 19 million people, or 40% of the state's population.</p> <p>But record dry conditions have strained the system, lowering reservoir levels, and the State Water Project, which gets its water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, has estimated it will only be able to deliver about 5% of its usual allocation this year.</p> <p>January, February and March of this year were the driest three months in recorded state history in terms of rainfall and snowfall, Kimitch said.</p> <p>The Metropolitan Water District said that the 2020 and 2021 water years had the least rainfall on record for two consecutive years. In addition, Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's main reservoir, reached its lowest point last year since being filled in the 1970s.</p> <p>California Gov. Gavin Newsom has asked people to voluntarily reduce their water consumption by 15%, but so far residents have been slow to meet that goal.</p>

Several water districts have instituted water conservation measures. On Tuesday, the board of the East Bay Municipal Utility District voted to reduce water usage by 10% and cap daily usage for some 1.4 million customers in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, including Oakland and Berkeley. Households will be allowed to use 1,646 gallons (6,231 litres) per day — far above the average household usage of about 200 gallons (757 litres) daily — and the agency expected that only 1% to 2% of customers will exceed the limit, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The Metropolitan Water District restrictions apply to areas of Los Angeles, Ventura and San Bernardino counties that rely mostly on state water supplied through the district, including some parts of Los Angeles city. Mainly urban areas are impacted.

The MWD's client water agencies must implement either the one-day-a-week outdoor use restriction or find other ways of making equivalent reductions in water demand, Kimitch said.

Although the water agencies support the water conservation move, it remains to be seen whether the public will do it, Kimitch said.

The Metropolitan Water District will monitor water use and if the restrictions don't work, it could order an all-out ban on outdoor watering as soon as September, she said.

Meanwhile, state lawmakers have taken the first step toward lowering the standard for how much water people use in their homes.

California's current standard for residential indoor water use is 55 gallons (208 liters) per person per day. The rule doesn't apply to customers, meaning regulators don't write tickets to people for using more water than they are allowed. Instead, the state requires water agencies to meet that standard across all of its customers.

But the state Senate overwhelmingly voted last week to lower the standard to 47 gallons (178 liters) per person per day starting in 2025 and 42 gallons (159 liters) per person per day beginning in 2030.

The bill has not yet passed the Assembly, meaning it is still likely months away from becoming law.

The U.S. West is in the middle of a severe drought just a few years after record rain and snowfall filled reservoirs to capacity. Scientists say this boom-and-bust cycle is driven by climate change that will be marked by longer, more severe droughts. A study from earlier this year found the U.S. West was in the middle of a megadrought that is now the driest in at least 1,200 years.

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HEADLINE	04/25 Top advisers' risky, secret visit to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/inside-blinken-austins-risky-secret-visit-ukraine/story?id=84295558
GIST	<p>In the quiet weekend morning hours Saturday, two of President Joe Biden's top advisers boarded their flights -- the start of a long journey shrouded in secrecy.</p> <p>It was a secret -- until Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spilled just hours after they were wheels up. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin were coming to visit Kyiv, the war-time president announced.</p> <p>While the Biden administration refused to comment all weekend, it was a hiccup that could have derailed the secret visit, amid intense security concerns about sending two Cabinet officials to an active war zone.</p> <p>In the end, Blinken, Austin, and a small delegation arrived in Kyiv Sunday for a three-hour meeting with Zelenskyy, carrying with them a number of major announcements to make -- millions more in U.S. security assistance, increased U.S. training for Ukrainian troops, the return of U.S. diplomats to Ukraine, and after three years of vacancy, a nominee for a new U.S. ambassador.</p>

Senior State and Defense Department officials dismissed any concerns that Zelenskyy's announcement imperiled the trip: "We plan for any number of contingencies. ... It didn't change anything about our commitment to go there today and to share what we have to say," a senior State Department official told reporters Sunday.

But the administration refused to confirm the trip took place until the early morning hours Monday -- only when the U.S. team returned across the border in Poland.

"We don't know how the rest of this war will unfold, but we do know that a sovereign, independent Ukraine will be around a lot longer than Vladimir Putin is on the scene, and our support for Ukraine going forward will continue," Blinken told reporters Monday morning in Poland.

The visit was the first by senior U.S. officials since Russia's invasion started 60 days ago -- "part symbolism but also very substantive," Blinken said as he sat across the table from Zelenskyy.

That substance was in what he and Austin carried with them, including \$165 million for Ukraine to purchase ammunition for its Soviet-era weaponry and \$322 million for Ukraine to purchase from defense firms -- what's known as foreign military financing. In total, the Biden administration intends to obligate more than \$713 million in foreign military financing for Ukraine and 15 other European countries, virtually all of whom have supported Ukraine's military from their own stockpiles.

Blinken also announced Biden would formally nominate Bridget Brink, a career diplomat currently serving as U.S. ambassador to Slovakia, to serve as envoy in Kyiv. U.S. diplomats will eventually return to the capital too, Blinken said, as they start this week by making the journey across the border from Poland to Lviv on a daily basis.

It's a journey Blinken and Austin now know personally. They arrived in southeastern Poland Saturday evening near the border with Ukraine -- riding the train to Kyiv in the opposite direction from the nearly three million Ukrainian refugees who've arrived in Poland.

As passengers, they saw little of the war-torn country, according to a senior State Department official, who said shades on the windows blacked out much of the view.

Once in the capital, no longer under Russian siege, Blinken said there were signs that normal life was returning.

"We certainly saw people on the streets in Kyiv -- evidence of that fact that the battle for Kyiv was won, and there is what looks from the surface at least to be normal life," he told reporters afterwards. "But that's in stark contrast to what's going on in other parts of Ukraine -- in the south and the east -- where the Russian brutality is doing horrific things to people every single day."

From the train, they traveled straight to the presidential palace for three hours of meetings with Zelenskyy and his team, according to a senior State Department official, including Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, and Andriy Yermak, head of the Office of the President.

"We had a really good, detailed, substantive, focused conversation for the better part of three hours that really went into every aspect of this campaign and next steps," the senior State Department official said.

It was the first time senior U.S. officials had seen Zelenskyy since Russia invaded -- a chance to check in on the TV star, who won a surprising presidential election, and who's become a wartime leader and world figure.

When a U.S. delegation visited Zelenskyy last May -- the first meeting between Biden officials and a Ukrainian president already bruised by American politics -- Zelenskyy was "constantly energized, moving from one thing to another," the senior State Department official said.

"Now, there's a deliberateness and a kind of gravitas," they said, describing him as "very focused, very detail-oriented on different aspects of this, whether the security, the economic, the humanitarian, the sanctions. He went into real detail on each, but in a very deliberate way."

Even physically, he "looked remarkably well," the official added.

When the U.S. delegation asked about his family, Zelenskyy said they were doing ok, but "'the hard part is we just don't see each other. We miss each other,'" the official recounted him saying.

"It was just a kind of human moment. Everyone in this thing is an individual with their own individual lives and family lives," they added. "He's going from being a TV celebrity to maybe the most recognized leader -- other than the president of the United States and Vladimir Putin -- in the world. He's borne that remarkably well."

An in-person conversation makes working through any differences easier, officials said -- including Zelenskyy's push for the U.S. to designate Russia a state sponsor of terrorism. The designation, made by the State Department, carries the strictest U.S. sanctions, although Russia is already under many of them.

Zelenskyy personally asked Biden to designate Russia during a phone call earlier this month, a U.S. official confirmed to ABC News.

The designation is for governments that support terrorist groups, not ones that terrorize, per the senior State Department official, who said during their talks, they explained State Department lawyers are reviewing the possibility, "but it's a statute. It's a legal determination."

"Look, the Russians are terrorizing the Ukrainians. But that's different than saying they meet the criteria of the SST [state sponsor of terrorism designation]."

But if face-to-face interactions are that important, it begs the question why didn't Biden himself go. Another senior State Department official pointed to security concerns.

"The president of the United States is somewhat singular in terms of what travel would require, so it goes well beyond what a cabinet secretary would - or what virtually any other world leader - would require."

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HEADLINE	04/26 Major Japan railway renewable energy only
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/major-japan-railway-now-powered-renewable-energy-84334004
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- Tokyo's Shibuya is famed for its Scramble Crossing, where crowds of people crisscross the intersection in a scene symbolizing urban Japan's congestion and anonymity. It may have added another boasting right.</p> <p>Tokyu Railways' trains running through Shibuya and other stations were switched to power generated only by solar and other renewable sources starting April 1.</p> <p>That means the carbon dioxide emissions of Tokyu's sprawling network of seven train lines and one tram service now stand at zero, with green energy being used at all its stations, including for vending machines for drinks, security camera screens and lighting.</p> <p>Tokyu, which employs 3,855 people and connects Tokyo with nearby Yokohama, is the first railroad operator in Japan to have achieved that goal. It says the carbon dioxide reduction is equivalent to the annual average emissions of 56,000 Japanese households.</p>

Nicholas Little, director of railway education at Michigan State University's Center for Railway Research and Education, commends Tokyu for promoting renewable energy but stressed the importance of boosting the bottom-line amount of that renewable energy.

"I would stress the bigger impacts come from increasing electricity generation from renewable sources," he said. "The long-term battle is to increase production of renewable electricity and provide the transmission infrastructure to get it to the places of consumption."

The technology used by Tokyu's trains is among the most ecologically friendly options for railways. The other two options are batteries and hydrogen power.

And so is it just a publicity stunt, or is Tokyu moving in the right direction?

Ryo Takagi, a professor at Kogakuin University and specialist in electric railway systems, believes the answer isn't simple because how train technology evolves is complex and depends on many uncertain societal factors.

In a nutshell, Tokyu's efforts are definitely not hurting and are probably better than doing nothing. They show the company is taking up the challenge of promoting clean energy, he said.

"But I am not going out of my way to praise it as great," Takagi said.

Bigger gains would come from switching from diesel trains in rural areas to hydrogen powered lines and from switching gas-guzzling cars to electric, he said.

Tokyu paid an undisclosed amount to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility behind the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, for certification vouching for its use of renewables, even as Japan continues to use coal and other fossil fuels.

"We don't see this as reaching our goal but just a start," said Assistant Manager Yoshimasa Kitano at Tokyu's headquarters, a few minutes' walk from the Scramble Crossing.

Such steps are crucial for Japan, the world's sixth-biggest carbon emitter, to attain its goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050.

Only about 20% of Japan's electricity comes from renewable sources, according to the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, a Tokyo-based independent non-profit research organization.

That lags way behind New Zealand, for instance, where 84% of power used comes from renewable energy sources. New Zealand hopes to make that 100% by 2035.

The renewable sources driving Tokyu trains include hydropower, geothermal-power, wind power and solar power, according to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that provides the electricity and tracks its energy sourcing.

Tokyu has more than 100 kilometers (64 miles) of railway tracks serving 2.2 million people a day, including commuting "salarymen" and "salarywomen" and schoolchildren in uniforms.

Since the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, when a tsunami set off by a massive earthquake sent three reactors into meltdowns, Japan has shut down most of its nuclear plants and ramped up use of coal-fired power plants.

The country aims to have 36%-38% of its energy come from renewable sources by 2030, while slashing overall energy use.

Tokyu Railways has sought to publicize its effort with posters and YouTube clips.

	<p>Still, Ryuichi Yagi, who heads his own company that used to make neckties but has switched to wallets appeared surprised to learn he was riding on a “green train.”</p> <p>“I had no idea,” he said.</p> <p>Yagi switched his business because of Japan's “cool biz” movement. It encourages male office workers to doff their suits for open-necked short-sleeve shirts to conserve energy by keeping air conditioning to a minimum in hot summer months.</p> <p>In a sense, he said, “I lead a very green life.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Families testify against military housing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/military-families-testify-dangerous-housing-conditions/story?id=84315959
GIST	<p>Capt. Samuel Choe, a former resident of Fort Gordon in Georgia, flew 17 hours from his deployment in South Korea to testify before a Senate subcommittee Tuesday about the mold exposure he said his family endured in private military housing and the chronic health issues suffered by his 8-year-old daughter, including a skin condition called severe atopic dermatitis -- or severe eczema.</p> <p>The degree of her condition, which he described as "potentially fatal," had caused her to wake up in the middle of the night to parts of her body caked in blood from minor scratches or irritation, he said, adding that it would "haunt" his daughter "for the rest of our lives."</p> <p>"I do not recall ever seeing the type [of] conditions that we have lived under while we were at Fort Gordon," said Choe, who has served in the military for 12 years and grew up in military housing with his parents.</p> <p>Choe was among the family members and advocates who testified Tuesday at the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations about what they said was mismanagement, neglect and abuse they suffered in private military housing paid for using defense appropriations funds for service members' on-base accommodations.</p> <p>Their concerns -- focused on one of the Army, Air Force and Navy's largest private housing providers, Balfour Beatty -- ranged from environmental hazards, including unaddressed mold, to logistical failures leading to delayed repairs. In total, Balfour provides housing on 55 separate Army, Navy and Air Force bases across 26 states, with a total of over 43,000 on-base homes occupied by roughly 150,000 residents, according to the company.</p> <p>The hearing was held hours after the subcommittee released a bipartisan "Mistreatment of Military Families in Privatized Housing" report detailing alleged negligent responses and deceitful practices by Balfour Beatty.</p> <p>The same company pleaded guilty last year to fraud after a Department of Justice investigation that uncovered instances of falsified data in Balfour's internal data management software. Artificially augmenting the number of resolved work orders allowed Balfour employees to receive larger bonuses -- which at the time was part of the company's financial compensation policy, the probe found.</p> <p>The plea deal included a \$65 million fine and three-year probation during which an independent compliance body monitors the company's activity.</p> <p>The report released Tuesday specifically examines conditions at Balfour housing units on Georgia's Fort Gordon Army Base and Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas between late 2019 and early 2022.</p>

Tech. Sgt. Jack Fe Torres, who said his wife and children also suffered a host of medical problems after being exposed to mold in a Balfour home at Sheppard Air Force Base also testified. The family's issues began with an insufficient water heater repair, he said, which led to a flood and then to mold.

While trying to address this issue, Torres said he noticed that work orders submitted to Balfour on his family's behalf were doctored to minimize the severity of the situation.

"At one point, we were told that a large spot of mold in our mechanical room wall was just a burn mark," he said.

The hearing included interviews with over a dozen military families and former Balfour employees. Two Balfour executives, including President of Facility Operations, Renovation and Construction Richard Taylor, testified as well.

"I reject the suggestion that it's a systemic failure," he said in response to Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., detailing a host of concerns flagged by residents. Taylor suggested Choe's daughter, for example, could have contracted her illness outside the home.

Paula Cook, Balfour's vice president of military community management, said the company did all it could for its residents.

Both insisted they were not aware of the data manipulation that had occurred, insisted there was no longer fraudulent activity going on at Balfour and said the issues the company was accused of were isolated and unrelated. An unnamed third party now fields Balfour military housing complaint calls, they testified, and the company has a new system to keep Balfour on-site employees from editing work order histories.

At one point, Ossoff bluntly asked, "Did your senior executives know that for six years, the company was engaging in fraud?"

Taylor said that "no," he did not.

Ossoff followed up: "Would you know now if your company was continuing to engage in fraud?"

"Yes," Taylor responded.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Syria: Israel missile attack near Damascus
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syria-israel-attacked-areas-capital-damascus-84330077
GIST	<p>DAMASCUS, Syria -- Syrian air defenses were active early Wednesday as Israel fired several surface-to-surface missiles at military positions near the capital, Damascus, state media reported. There was no immediate word on casualties.</p> <p>State media quoted an unidentified Syrian military official as saying that the missiles were fired from northern Israel shortly after midnight and that most of them were shot down. It added that the military was still looking into the "results of the aggression."</p> <p>The attacks came hours after the Israeli military said an Israeli drone crashed on the Syrian side of the border Tuesday, adding that an investigation was opened into the case.</p> <p>The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said several missiles struck areas near Damascus International Airport on the southern edge of the capital as well as several suburbs. It said the areas hit host Syrian military positions as well as some of Iran-backed fighters.</p> <p>There was no comment from the Israeli military on the attacks near Damascus.</p>

	<p>It was the latest attack on Syria since April 14, when several missiles hit Syrian army positions near Damascus.</p> <p>Israel has staged hundreds of strikes on targets in Syria over the years but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.</p> <p>It has acknowledged, however, that it targets the bases of Iran-allied militias, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah group that has fighters deployed in Syria. It says it attacks arms shipments believed to be bound for the militias.</p> <p>Israel justifies its strikes on facilities and weapons inside Syria by saying that an Iranian presence on its northern frontier is a red line.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Living wage out of reach for many families
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/american-families-living-wage-reach-report/story?id=84330584
GIST	<p>A new report diving into the data on vital measures of health and social determinants of health finds that women, and particularly women of color, continue to experience steep pay gaps, that many Americans cannot afford child care and many school districts may be underfunded.</p> <p>The 2022 County Health Rankings report, shared in advance with ABC News, offers a unique snapshot of whether and how Americans are thriving -- or as it may be, surviving.</p> <p>Metrics like these are meaningful as the nation emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and contends with the "intertwined crises of structural racism and economic exclusion" to examine how living wages or lack thereof "can impact a just recovery," the report said.</p> <p>"The data reinforces what we've known for some time. People in both rural and urban communities face long-standing barriers, systemic barriers -- avoidable barriers -- that get in the way of groups of people and places in our country from being able to live long and well," Sheri Johnson, co-director of County Health Rankings & Roadmaps and director of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, told ABC News.</p> <p>The rankings find "troubling issues" affecting women and families with children regarding economic security and family support, underscoring what the pandemic has repeatedly laid bare: "glaring failures" within the infrastructures of wage equity, child care costs and school funding.</p> <p>Equal pay is not just a 'women's issue' Women earn little more than 80 cents for every dollar men earn, on average, for the same work, the rankings find. But that's not all.</p> <p>To earn the \$61,807 average salary of a white man, an Asian woman must work an extra 34 days, the report said.</p> <p>A white woman must work 103 more days to earn that same \$62,000 salary.</p> <p>The report said a Black woman must work 223 days to make up that difference, while an American Indian/Alaska Native woman would have to work 266 days.</p> <p>A Hispanic woman would have to work 299 days to make up that salary difference.</p> <p>COVID's prolonged toll "exposed the labor force barriers that prevent full participation of women and caregivers" and "places an additional burden on women with low incomes and women of color, who are the least likely to have employer-provided benefits," the study said.</p>

An economic security infrastructure that is inequitable for some weakens the entire system, Johnson said.

"There are consequences when we haven't constructed community conditions for everyone to thrive," Johnson said.

Child care costs exceed what many Americans can afford:

Across counties, a family with two children spends, on average, a quarter of its household income on child care, the report said.

For those making the hourly \$7.25 federal minimum wage, child care costs would take up nearly 90% of their annual income.

By that math, the average child care provider likely cannot afford their own services, which would consume more than half their average \$25,460 annual income if they had two children.

"That's pretty striking," Johnson said -- especially when contrasted with the government's suggestion that families not spend more than 7% of their income on child care.

The rankings find that during the pandemic, the lack of affordable child care forced parents – especially mothers – out of the workforce and also hit child care providers, who were disproportionately women, which harmed families' and communities' well-being.

Stark differences in school funding across rural, urban and suburban communities

Half of all counties included in this analysis had school districts operating at a deficit, the rankings find. Among those districts, per-pupil spending, on average, was \$3,000 below the annual estimated amount needed to support average test scores.

While schools in large urban metro counties, on average, operated under large deficits, schools in rural counties – the majority of all U.S. counties – were overrepresented among counties with inadequate school funding.

There are "patterns of disinvestment" reflected by the disproportionate geographic spread of school funding deficits, Johnson said.

Many counties in the western and southern U.S. operate with funding deficits. School districts in these counties, on average, spend less than what is estimated to be necessary to achieve national average test scores.

Counties with higher proportions of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian & Alaska Native populations experience funding deficits notably greater than most U.S. counties, the report found. Funding deficits are especially high in the Southern Black Belt region.

A solution – relieving the "stress pathways" that exacerbate poor health among those who were already hurting, Johnson said -- such as "ensuring equal pay for equal work through policies such as paid family leave, paid sick leave, universal basic income, living wage laws, Child Tax Credit expansion, and the Earned Income Tax Credit," the report says.

"We can expect more of the same if we do nothing," Johnson said. "And the same is not fair. It's not just, and it's not necessary."

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HEADLINE	04/26 Housing shortfall, soaring rents hit colleges
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/housing-shortage-soaring-rents-squeeze-us-college-students/

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — UC Berkeley sophomore Terrell Thompson slept in his car for nearly two weeks at the start of the school year last fall, living out of a suitcase stashed in the trunk and texting dozens of landlords a day in a desperate search for a place to live.

The high-achieving student from a low-income household in Sacramento, California, was majoring in business administration at one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Yet, Thompson folded his 6-foot frame into the back seat of his Honda Accord at night, wondering how he would ever find a home in the exorbitantly expensive San Francisco Bay Area city.

“Academically it was hard, because I’m worried about finding housing and I’m worried about my clothes and I’m worried about getting my car broken into all the time,” said the 19-year-old Thompson, who now lives in a studio apartment he found last September. “I was anxious 24/7.”

College students across the U.S. are looking for housing for the 2022-23 school year and if 2021 was any indication, it won’t be easy. Students at colleges from California to Florida were denied on-campus housing last fall and found themselves sitting out the year at home or living in motel rooms or vehicles as surging rents and decades of failing to build sufficient student housing came to a head.

For some colleges, the housing crunch was related to increased demand by students who had been stuck at home during the pandemic. For others, including many in California, the shortage reflects a deeper conflict between the colleges and homeowners who don’t want new housing built for students who they say increase congestion and noise.

In March, the University of California, Berkeley, said it would have to cap student enrollment because of a lawsuit brought by irate neighbors over the school’s growth. State lawmakers fast-tracked a fix to allow the campus to enroll as many students as planned for the 2022 fall semester, but the legislation does nothing to produce more housing.

Nationally, 43% of students at four-year universities experienced housing insecurity in 2020, up from 35% in 2019, according to an annual survey conducted by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University. Students reported being unable to pay utilities, rent or mortgage, living in overcrowded units, or moving in with others due to financial difficulties.

And for the first time since it began tracking basic needs in 2015, the survey found an equal percentage — 14% — of students at both four-year and two-year colleges who had experienced homelessness in the last year, said Mark Huelsman, the center’s director of policy and advocacy.

“This is a function of rents rising, the inability of communities and institutions to build enough housing for students and other costs of college going up that create a perfect storm for students,” he said.

For some students, the lack of affordable housing could mean the difference between going to college or not. Others take on massive debt or live so precariously they miss out on all the extracurricular benefits of higher education.

Jonathan Dena, a first-generation college student from the Sacramento area, almost rejected UC Berkeley over the lack of housing, even though it was his “dream program.” He found a studio at the heavily subsidized Rochdale Apartments for under \$1,300 a month, but he might have to move because the bare-bones units may close for a seismic renovation.

Dena, 29, wants to continue living within walking distance of campus for a robust college experience.

But the urban studies major and student government housing commission officer said “it’s kind of scary” how high rents are near campus. Online listings showed a newer one-bedroom for one person at \$3,700, as well as a 240-square foot (22 square-meter) bedroom for two people sharing a bathroom for nearly \$1,700 per person a month.

“If I go to school in Berkeley, I would love to live in Berkeley,” he said.

Nationally, rents have increased 17% since March 2020, said Chris Salviati, senior economist with Apartment List, but the increase has been higher in some popular college towns. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, saw a 24% jump in rents and Tempe, Arizona, saw a 31% hike.

In some cases, the rental increases have been exacerbated by a lack of on-campus housing.

Last fall, demand for on-campus housing was so high that the University of Tampa offered incoming freshmen a break on tuition if they deferred until fall 2022. Rent in the Florida city has skyrocketed nearly 30% from a year ago, according to Apartment List.

Rent in Knoxville has soared 36% since March 2020, and it could get worse after the University of Tennessee announced a new lottery system for its dorms this fall, saying it needs to prioritize housing for a larger freshman class.

Even two-year community colleges, which have not traditionally provided dorms, are rethinking student needs as the cost of housing rises.

Last October, Long Beach City College launched a pilot program to provide up to 15 homeless students space in an enclosed parking garage. They sleep in their cars and have access to bathrooms and showers, electrical outlets and internet while they work with counselors to find permanent housing.

Uduak-Joe Ntuk, president of the college’s Board of Trustees, hesitated when asked if the program will be renewed.

“I want to say no, but I think we will,” he said. “We’re going to have new students come fall semester this year that are going to be in a similar situation, and for us to do nothing is untenable.”

California prides itself on its robust higher education system, but has struggled with housing at its four-year colleges. Berkeley is notoriously difficult, with cut-throat competition for the few affordable apartments within walking distance to campus.

“I definitely was not prepared to be this stressed about housing every year,” said Jennifer Lopez, 21, a UC Berkeley senior from Cudahy, in southeastern Los Angeles County, and the first in her family to attend college.

She imagined she would spend all four years on campus in dorms, but found herself in a scramble for a safe, affordable place to sleep. The urban studies major currently splits an attic space in what is technically a one-bedroom apartment shared by four undergraduates, one of whom sleeps in the dining room.

The total monthly rent is nearly \$3,700 — laughably high in most U.S. cities — but she’s grateful for it.

“If I hadn’t heard about this place, I was either going to end up living in a basement, or in this other apartment I know (where) the girls are struggling with leaks and mold,” Lopez said.

The Basic Needs Center at UC Berkeley, which operates a food pantry for students and faculty, found in a snapshot survey that a quarter of undergraduates reported they “lacked a safe, regular and adequate nighttime place to stay and sleep” at some point since October.

“That’s huge,” said Ruben Canedo, co-chair of UC’s systemwide Basic Needs Committee. “This generation of students is navigating the most expensive cost-of-living market while at the same time having the least amount of financial support accessible to them.”

Thompson, the business administration major, started looking for an apartment last May, after spending his first year at home taking classes remotely to save money. He quickly realized that his rental budget of \$750 was wildly inadequate and as a second-year student, he no longer qualified for priority in the dorms.

By the time classes began in late August, he was in a panic. He tried commuting from his home in Sacramento, leaving before 6 a.m. for the 80-mile (130-kilometer) drive to Berkeley and returning home around midnight to avoid traffic.

But that was grueling so he took to sleeping in his car. Initially he parked far away in a spot without parking limits. Then he parked at a lot between two student dorm complexes closer to campus, where exuberant partying kept him up at night.

He attended classes, studied and ate sparingly to save on ballooning food costs. He looked at apartments where five people were squeezed into two bedrooms with pared-down belongings stored under beds.

He slept in his car for almost two weeks until a sympathetic landlord who had also grown up in a low-income home reached out, offering a studio within walking distance of campus. The rent is \$1,000 a month, and he hopes to stay until he graduates.

“I think I have a little bit of a PTSD factor,” he said.

Most students have no idea of the housing situation when they choose to attend UC Berkeley, said 19-year-old freshman Sanaa Sodhi, and the university needs to do more to prepare students and support them in their search.

The political science major is excited to move out of the dorms and into a two-bedroom apartment where she and three friends are taking over the lease. The unit is older but a bargain at \$3,000 a month, she said. The housemates were prepared to pay up to \$5,200 for a safe place close to campus.

“You don’t honestly know the severity of the situation before you’re in it,” she said, adding that landlords hold all the cards. “They know that whatever price they charge, we’ll inevitably have to pay it because we don’t really have a choice except maybe to live out of our cars.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Earth Day self-immolation stirs questions
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/activists-self-immolation-stirs-questions-on-faith-protest/
GIST	<p>Wynn Bruce, a 50-year-old climate activist and Buddhist, set himself on fire in front of the U.S. Supreme Court last week, prompting a national conversation about his motivation and whether he may have been inspired by Buddhist monks who self-immolated in the past to protest government atrocities.</p> <p>Bruce, a photographer from Boulder, Colorado, walked up to the plaza of the Supreme Court around 6:30 p.m. Friday – on Earth Day — then sat down and set himself ablaze, a law enforcement official said. Supreme Court police officers responded immediately but were unable to extinguish the blaze in time to save him.</p> <p>Investigators, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said they did not immediately locate a manifesto or note at the scene and that officials were still working to determine a motive.</p> <p>On Saturday, Kritee Kanko, a Zen Buddhist priest who described herself as Bruce’s friend, shared an emotional post on her public Twitter account saying his self-immolation was “not suicide” but “a deeply fearless act of compassion to bring attention to climate crisis.”</p> <p>She added that Bruce had been planning the act for at least a year. She wrote: “#wynnbruce I am so moved.” She got sympathetic responses as well as backlash.</p>

Kanko and other members of the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center in Boulder, released a statement Monday saying “none of the Buddhist teachers in the Boulder area knew about (Bruce’s) plans to self-immolate on this Earth Day,” and that had they known about his plan, they would have stopped him. Bruce was a frequent visitor to the Buddhist retreat center in the mountains near Boulder where he meditated with the community, Kanko said.

“We have never talked about self-immolation, and we do not think self-immolation is a climate action,” the statement said. “Nevertheless, given the dire state of the planet and worsening climate crisis, we understand why someone might do that.”

On Facebook, Bruce wrote about following the spiritual tradition of Shambhala, which combines Tibetan Buddhism with the principles of living “an uplifted life, fully engaged with the world,” according to the Boulder Shambhala Center. Bruce also posted praise for Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, a leader of engaged Buddhism, around the time of his death in January.

Bruce’s act of sitting down and setting himself on fire was reminiscent of the events of June 11, 1963, when Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese monk, seated cross-legged, burned himself to death at a busy Saigon intersection. He was protesting the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government led by Ngo Dinh Diem, a staunch Catholic.

In a letter to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., whom Hanh counted as a friend, Hanh wrote that he drew inspiration from the Vietnamese monk’s self-sacrifice, saying: “To burn oneself by fire is to prove what one is saying is of the utmost importance. There is nothing more painful than burning oneself. To say something while experiencing this kind of pain is to say it with utmost courage, frankness, determination and sincerity.”

In Tibet, anti-Chinese activists have employed self-immolation as a form of protest. The International Campaign for Tibet says 131 men and 28 women – monks, nuns and laypeople among them – have self-immolated since 2009 to protest against Beijing’s strict controls over the region and their religion.

Buddhism as a religion does not unilaterally condone the act of self-immolation or taking one’s life, said Robert Barnett, a London-based researcher of modern Tibetan history and politics.

“Killing yourself is considered damaging in Buddhism because life is precious,” he said. “But if a person self-immolates because of a higher motivation and it’s not out of a negative emotion such as depression or sadness, then the Buddhist position becomes far more complex.”

If self-immolation is done to help the world, it might be accepted as a positive action, Barnett said. He cited a story from the “Jataka Tales,” a body of South Asian literature concerning the prior incarnations of the Buddha in human and animal form. In that particular tale, an incarnation of the Buddha, in an act of selfless compassion, offers himself to an emaciated tigress who was so hungry that she was ready to devour her own cubs.

“But that kind of self-sacrifice is not encouraged, developed or talked about for normal people (other than the Buddha),” he said, adding that this is because of “the immense difficulty of cultivating positive motivation in any situation, let alone maintaining it under stress or in conditions of extreme pain.”

Buddhism emphasizes emotional balance, inclusiveness, kindness, compassion and wisdom, said Roshi Joan Halifax, an environmental activist and abbot of the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

“What we’re seeing today among many people is hopelessness,” she said. “What we are called to do is not to be disabled by that sense of futility, but to transform our moral suffering into wise hope and courageous action.”

Despite the pessimism that some climate activists may feel, there is reason to remain hopeful, Halifax said.

“You see that people are waking up to the magnitude of the climate catastrophe,” she said, noting that countries and corporations are moving away from damaging practices and toward clean energy.

“I feel inspired and hopeful by our ability to change and adapt in this ever-changing world,” she said. “My heart is heavy that (Bruce) did not have that kind of optimism.”

Those who knew Bruce saw a man who was kind, playful and idealistic – an avid dancer who participated in weekly events. He was also known for biking and embracing public transportation.

Bruce, who enjoyed the outdoors, brought an intensity to whatever he did, said his friend Jeffry Buechler. On Buechler’s wedding day in 2014, Bruce, on a whim, decided to go for a dip in a cold mountain lake early in the morning, he said.

Bruce also suffered lasting effects from a brain injury he sustained in a car wreck that killed his best friend about 30 years ago, Buechler said.

Marco DeGaetano, who met Bruce in the 1990s when they both attended a Universalist church in Denver, said “Wynn seemed to have an affinity for people who needed help.”

He recalled Bruce being kind to a church member with a mental illness when others distanced themselves.

DeGaetano said he last saw Bruce about a month ago, and he seemed outgoing and friendly as always — every time he saw Bruce, “he had a smile on his face.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Substitute teachers vanished; new ideas?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/substitute-teachers-vanished-so-wa-schools-turned-to-new-ideas/
GIST	<p>EVERETT — Over the past few months, Nathan Roberts has witnessed dozens of substitute teachers stumble through their first days at Penny Creek Elementary School.</p> <p>He’s watched them circle the parking lot outside, wondering whether to leave their car in a visitor or employee spot. He’s encountered subs in the hallway, looking for the library or a place to make copies of classwork. And he’s noticed when they struggle to remember a kid’s name while taking attendance or praising students for good work.</p> <p>Roberts is a substitute, too, but by now he knows his way around campus. Unlike the other subs — many of them parent volunteers or people looking for a little extra work — he’s a full-time, salaried employee with health benefits and a long-term contract with Everett Public Schools. In January, the school district hired Roberts and about two dozen other “floaters” as part of a broader effort to improve the quality of substitute teaching and alleviate a staffing crunch that grew dire during this winter’s COVID-19 surge.</p> <p>“Instead of trying to find a sub every single morning, or bringing in administration, I can step in for the entire week and give those kids some consistency,” Roberts said.</p> <p>Roberts represents one example of how the recent coronavirus wave prompted school districts to reconsider their relationship with — and reliance on — substitute teachers. Much like bus drivers and custodians, substitutes have long been among the lowest-paid workers in education but remain critical to keeping schools open day to day. And they have a significant impact on student learning: Studies have linked teacher absences and uncertified, less trained subs to declines in student achievement.</p> <p>Even before COVID, the U.S. faced a critical shortage of substitutes. Schools were unable to cover teacher absences some 20 percent of the time in 2018-19, according to the Frontline Research and Learning Institute, a</p>

research firm. Black and Hispanic students and students living in poverty were most likely to have to go without substitutes, according to [a 2020 study](#) from the Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

COVID made a bad situation worse. Some 95 percent of district leaders reported in a recent [survey](#) that the pandemic caused a shortage of substitute teachers. And while the winter's omicron wave has passed, the substitute staffing crunch isn't going away.

"Teachers will continue to be absent, so we need to have a smarter way to cover those absences," said Jessie Weiser, director of capacity building with Substantial Classrooms, a national nonprofit that works with school districts to improve the substitute experience. "Substitute teachers are an essential part of education. They're not just a Plan B or an afterthought."

The Everett district's decision to hire floaters and offer them benefits was part of a strategy born out of crisis. Last fall, in the district, nearly half of teacher absences went unfilled, compared with 26 percent in fall 2019. Administrators, principals, librarians and other staff members regularly covered those classrooms. Teachers collected extra stipends to sacrifice their planning periods to cover for a missing colleague.

The district of 20,000 students — where [42 percent come from low-income households, 21 percent are Hispanic and 5 percent are Black](#) — eventually had to resort to hiring substitutes who had only emergency certification. (In Washington, districts can apply to hire emergency substitutes who have a bachelor's degree but no formal education training.)

In January, the district also upped its daily pay — from \$200 to \$250 — for all substitutes who worked on Mondays or Fridays, the most common days for teachers to call out. And it created an extra stipend for those who work at least 15 days every month until summer break. Still, that wasn't enough once omicron started spreading.

In the fall the superintendent charged a task force with overhauling the district's approach to recruiting, placing and training substitutes. Its [recommendations](#) included limiting training that would require subs to fill in and reaching out to retired teachers, as well as hiring the floaters. Chad Golden, executive director of human resources, also added a position in his office dedicated to recruiting substitutes.

Currently, the district is using federal COVID relief dollars to pay those substitute floaters, but Golden said the district's general budget could cover the program in the future — if it helps improve coverage rates for absent teachers and school administrators report positive feedback.

As Everett waits to see if its efforts make a difference, the Central Falls School District in Rhode Island credits its survival during the omicron surge to changes it made to substitute teaching six years ago.

"The role of the substitute teacher was obsolete," said Jay Midwood, chief of human capital for the district, recalling his thinking at the time. "The days of just getting a warm body or person in there just didn't impact teaching or learning in the way we know our kids needed it to be."

In 2016, the district launched a teaching fellowship program to provide yearlong contracts to about 30 aspiring teachers who are placed in its six schools. They can earn a higher daily rate than traditional substitutes, or put the extra amount toward health benefits. The district also provides individual coaching for the fellows and pays them a stipend to attend after-school training.

The fellowship is budget neutral: The district covers the extra pay for each fellow by diverting what it would have offered to teachers giving up their planning periods.

Midwood credited the fellows not only for helping the district through the omicron surge but also for creating a pipeline of potential educators who live in the same neighborhoods as Central Falls families. The district so far has hired 21 former fellows as full-time teachers, and another 20 have moved on to teach in neighboring districts.

Back in Washington, [Seattle Public Schools](#) has also tried to use substitute teaching as a way to both fill immediate needs and train future teachers. Through its [Academy for Rising Educators](#), launched in 2019, teachers-in-training take night and weekend classes at local colleges or universities to study for their certification and a guaranteed teaching placement in the city's schools. In the meantime, they serve as substitutes: About [60 substitutes](#) hired in January come from the academy or similar programs.

Southeast of Seattle, the growing [Tahoma School District](#), like Everett, hired full-time, roving substitutes to help with its immediate crisis. Administrators there also filled in for absent teachers — and returned to the central office with lessons about the reality of substitute teaching in Tahoma schools.

“What can we do to make this better?” Kimberly Allison, the district's instructional technology coordinator, remembered asking herself after subbing for a week last winter. “When you really start looking at the substitute experience, it's pretty abysmal.”

Recently, the district set a cap on how many teachers can be out at once for mandatory training. It also sent templates of lesson plans that teachers can leave for their temporary replacements. Allison hopes that next year, the district might offer stipends for substitutes to take additional training on classroom management and basic instructional skills.

By late March, the students and staff at Penny Creek had won Nathan Roberts over.

Roberts, 28, had started applying for full-time teaching jobs earlier that month after finishing a master's degree in education at Western Governors University, an online college. He added Penny Creek to the top of his list.

“I would love to stay here if a position's open,” he said. “Everyone's really supportive and professional. I know the kids now. They're easier to work with.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Home-price growth accelerates in 20 cities
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-26/home-price-appreciation-accelerates-once-again-in-20-u-s-cities
GIST	<p>Growth in U.S. home prices picked up again in February.</p> <p>A measure of prices in 20 U.S. cities soared 20.2% from a year earlier, up from the 18.9% annual increase in January, the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index showed Tuesday. All 20 cities saw double-digit price increases, with Phoenix, Tampa and Miami reporting the biggest year-over-year jumps.</p> <p>Prices in the Seattle area were up 26.6% from a year earlier, the seventh biggest year-over-year jump among the cities the index tracks.</p> <p>And February marked the beginning of the typically busier spring market, with Seattle-area prices up 4.4% from January, the biggest month-to-month jump since last spring. The index reflects single-family home sales in parts of King, Snohomish and Pierce counties.</p> <p>Nationally, prices surged 19.8%, the third-biggest increase in data going back 35 years, according to Craig Lazzara, global head of index investment strategy at S&P Dow Jones Indices.</p> <p>Demand for homes remains strong two years after the pandemic hit the U.S., spurring fierce bidding wars for a tight supply of listings. Rapidly rising mortgage rates — now at a 12-year high — are pushing some buyers to the sidelines, while others are racing to lock in deals before costs climb further.</p>

	<p>While the housing market is now in its traditionally busiest season, signs of a potential cooldown may be emerging. With little to buy, purchases of previously owned homes slowed last month to the lowest level since June 2020.</p> <p>“The macroeconomic environment is evolving rapidly and may not support extraordinary home-price growth for much longer,” Lazzara said in a statement. “We may soon begin to see the impact of increasing mortgage rates on home prices.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 CDC: 3-in-4 kids had coronavirus infections
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/cdc-estimates-3-in-4-kids-have-had-coronavirus-infections/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Three out of every four U.S. children have been infected with the coronavirus and more than half of all Americans had signs of previous infections, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers estimated in a report Tuesday.</p> <p>The researchers examined blood samples from more than 200,000 Americans and looked for virus-fighting antibodies made from infections, not vaccines. They found that signs of past infection rose dramatically between December and February, when the more contagious omicron variant surged through the U.S.</p> <p>The most striking increase was in children. The percentage of those 17 and under with antibodies rose from about 45% in December to about 75% in February.</p> <p>For Americans of all ages, about 34% had signs of prior infection in December. Just two months later, 58% did.</p> <p>“I did expect it to increase. I did not expect it to increase quite this much,” said Dr. Kristie Clarke, co-leader of a CDC team that tracks the extent of coronavirus infections.</p> <p>The older people were, the less likely they had evidence of past infections, the study found. For those 65 and older, 19% had signs of prior infection in December and 33% did in February. That may be because older adults have higher vaccination rates and they may be more likely to take other COVID-19 precautions, such as wearing masks and avoiding crowds, Clarke said.</p> <p>Clarke said the tests can detect antibodies for one to two years after infection, and possibly longer.</p> <p>Studies have shown previous infection can protect some people against severe disease and hospitalization, but CDC officials stressed that the previously infected should still get COVID-19 vaccines.</p> <p>The study looked for any detectable level of antibodies; it did not distinguish how many people had antibody levels that might be protective. Scientists are still trying to understand what role these kinds of antibodies play in protection from future virus exposures.</p> <p>Officials continue to urge Americans to get vaccines and boosters, which offer additional protection against COVID-19 for all, including those who were previously infected.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Covid pills must be taken within 5 days
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/explainer-covid-19-pills-must-be-taken-within-5-days/
GIST	<p>Newly infected COVID-19 patients have two treatment options that can be taken at home. But that convenience comes with a catch: The pills have to be taken as soon as possible once symptoms appear.</p> <p>The challenge is getting tested, obtaining a prescription and starting the pills in a short window.</p>

U.S. regulators authorized Pfizer's pill, Paxlovid, and Merck's Lagevrio late last year. In high-risk patients, both were shown to reduce the chances of hospitalization or death from COVID-19, although Pfizer's was much more effective.

A closer look:

WHO SHOULD TAKE THESE PILLS?

The antiviral pills aren't for everyone who gets a positive test. They are intended for those with mild or moderate COVID-19 who are more likely to become seriously ill. That includes older people and those with other health conditions like heart disease, cancer or diabetes that make them more vulnerable.

Both pills were OK'd for adults, while Paxlovid also is authorized for children ages 12 and older.

WHO SHOULDN'T TAKE THESE PILLS?

Merck's Lagevrio is not authorized for children because it might interfere with bone growth. It also isn't recommended for pregnant women because of the potential for birth defects.

Pfizer's pill isn't recommended for patients with severe kidney or liver problems. It also may not be the best option for some because it may interact with other medications.

The antiviral pills aren't authorized for people hospitalized with COVID-19.

WHAT'S THE TREATMENT WINDOW?

The pills have to be started as soon as possible, within five days of the start of symptoms. Cough, headache, fever, the loss of taste or smell and muscle and body aches are among the more common signs. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a website to check your symptoms.](#)

Dr. Cameron Wolfe, an infectious disease specialist at Duke University Hospital, advises getting a test as soon as you have symptoms of COVID-19.

"If you wait until you have started to get breathless, you have already to a large extent missed the window where these drugs will be helpful," Wolfe said.

WHERE CAN YOU GET THE PILLS?

Pharmacies, community health centers, hospitals and urgent care centers are among the sites stocking the antiviral pills, but prescriptions must come from a doctor or other authorized health worker.

The oral treatments are currently available in about 20,000 locations around the country, but President Joe Biden's administration expects that total to jump to around 40,000 in the next few weeks.

The administration also is working to expand the number of sites that can test patients and then provide the treatments in one visit. There are currently 2,200 of these so-called test-to-treat sites, including all 1,200 MinuteClinic locations inside CVS drugstores. Patients can find test-to-treat locations by checking the U.S. government's [COVID.gov](#) website.

Supplies of the pills were limited initially, but ample amounts are now available.

ARE THERE OTHER OPTIONS FOR NEW COVID-19 PATIENTS?

Yes, but it isn't as easy to use as a pill.

In February, the Food and Drug Administration authorized a new injected drug from Eli Lilly, bebtelovimab, that targets the omicron variant with virus-fighting antibodies. Regulators cleared that drug for adults and adolescent patients with mild-to-moderate cases of COVID-19 who are at high risk of hospitalization and death.

	<p>Earlier this year, regulators revoked emergency use authorization for another Lilly treatment and drugs from Regeneron and GlaxoSmithKline because they were no longer effective against the evolving virus.</p> <p>WHAT OTHER TREATMENTS MIGHT BE COMING? Japanese drugmaker Shionogi is testing another antiviral pill.</p> <p>Unlike Paxlovid, the company's drug does not require taking a second antiviral to boost its effectiveness against COVID-19. That could reduce some of the potential drug interaction problems associated with the Paxlovid combination.</p> <p>The Shionogi drug is also designed to be taken once daily for five days. That's simpler than Paxlovid's dosing, which must be taken twice daily for five days.</p> <p>In mid-stage testing, Shionogi said its drug significantly reduced COVID-19 viral levels and shedding in patients treated within five days of symptoms. The company is conducting a large global study in patients with increased risk of hospitalization or death due to age or other health issues. Early results from that study — which is being funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health — are expected by the fall.</p> <p>The company has already requested approval in Japan and plans to also file applications with regulators in the U.S. and Europe.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Vaccines protect against long Covid?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/article/long-covid-vaccines.html
GIST	<p>As the pandemic enters its third year, long COVID has emerged as an increasingly important concern. And many people are wondering whether getting a COVID shot can reduce their chances of developing long-term symptoms.</p> <p>What does the research show so far? The jury is still out, but a growing number of studies suggest that getting a COVID vaccine can reduce — though not eliminate — the risk of longer-term symptoms.</p> <p>Britain's Health Security Agency conducted an analysis of eight studies that had been published on the topic before mid-January. It reported that six of the studies found that vaccinated people who became infected with the coronavirus were less likely than unvaccinated patients to develop symptoms of long COVID. The remaining two studies found that vaccination did not appear to conclusively reduce the chances of developing long COVID.</p> <p>How much protection could vaccines offer, according to the studies that found benefit? Some study results suggest substantial protection, while others find only a slight benefit.</p> <p>One large study of electronic records of patients in the U.S. Veterans Health Administration found that vaccinated COVID patients had only a 13% lower risk than unvaccinated patients of having symptoms six months later.</p> <p>Two studies in Britain found a bigger effect. One study of about 1.2 million people, based on patients' reports via a phone app, found a 50% lower risk of lingering symptoms among vaccinated patients. Another, which has not been peer-reviewed and was based on surveying about 6,000 patients, found a 41% lower risk.</p> <p>A study of U.S. patients by Arcadia, a health care data firm, and the COVID Patient Recovery Alliance, a collaboration of leaders with health expertise in government and the private sector, found a larger benefit still. The study, which has not been peer-reviewed, analyzed records of about 240,000 patients infected with the coronavirus by May 2021 and found that those who had received even one dose of a COVID vaccine before their infection were one-seventh to one-tenth as likely to report two or more symptoms of</p>

long COVID 12 to 20 weeks later. That study also found that people who received their first vaccine dose after contracting the coronavirus were less likely to develop long COVID than those who remained unvaccinated, and the sooner they were vaccinated after infection, the lower the risk of long-term symptoms.

A study in Israel, which has also not been peer-reviewed, found through surveys that people who received two doses of vaccine had between 54% and 82% lower risk than unvaccinated patients to report having seven of the 10 most common long-term symptoms. They were generally no more likely to report symptoms like headache, muscle pain and other issues than people in the general population who had never gotten COVID, the study said. (The authors said they could not confirm whether the patients were vaccinated before or after they had gotten COVID, but said that because of Israeli vaccination policy it was likely most people who received two doses of vaccine were infected with the coronavirus sometime after they had gotten their shots.)

In the veterans' study, also not yet published in a peer-reviewed publication, researchers compared about 48,000 patients who were unvaccinated when they got COVID with about 16,000 patients who were vaccinated. It found that vaccinated patients mostly benefited by being less likely to develop lung problems and blood-clotting difficulties, said one of the authors, Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development at the VA St. Louis Health Care System and a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University in St. Louis. Other symptoms showed "very little risk reduction" from vaccines, he said.

"The overall message is that vaccines reduce but do not eliminate the risk of long COVID," said Al-Aly, adding that "reliance on vaccination as a sole mitigation strategy is wholly inadequate. It is like going to battle with a shield that only partially works."

What about studies that don't show any benefit?

In an analysis of electronic medical records of patients in the United States, researchers in Britain compared about 10,000 people who had received COVID vaccines with a similar number of people who had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus but had received a flu vaccine — an effort to limit the number of people in the study who might be considered vaccine hesitant or who generally had less healthy behaviors.

The study found that having a coronavirus vaccine before being infected did not reduce the risk of most symptoms of long COVID. There was some suggestion from the data that vaccinated people might be at lower risk of long-term symptoms like abnormal breathing and cognitive issues, the authors wrote, but those results were not statistically conclusive.

The researchers said it was possible that because their data relied on electronic health records, the study might have captured only patients with the most severe symptoms, rather than a wider range of patients who did not seek medical attention for their symptoms.

Why is the research conflicting?

One reason is the differences in the studies themselves. Not all researchers have defined long COVID in the same way, measured the same symptoms or tracked patients for the same length of time. For example, some studies recorded symptoms that have lingered at least 28 days after infection, while others measured symptoms people were experiencing six months later. Studies relying on patient surveys may yield very different results than those based on electronic medical records. And some studies did not have very diverse populations. Patients in the veterans' study, for example, were mostly older, white and male.

Are the results different for different coronavirus variants?

Much of the published data followed patients infected early in the pandemic. Some recently-published data included people infected by the highly contagious delta variant, but it is too early for studies about vaccines and long COVID that include the omicron variant. It is also too early for studies evaluating the effect of boosters on long COVID.

Is there anything scientists can conclude for sure?

Yes. Vaccines are very effective at preventing people from getting seriously ill from infection by all the variants known so far. And many studies have found that COVID patients sick enough to be hospitalized were more likely to have lasting health issues. So, by keeping people out of the hospital, vaccines should reduce the chances of that type of long-term post-COVID case.

Still, many people with long COVID had mild or even asymptomatic initial infections, and while some studies suggest vaccines have potential to ease their long-term symptoms, the evidence is not yet conclusive.

Vaccines do offer some protection against getting infected to begin with — and avoiding infection, of course, is the surest way to prevent long COVID.

Does the brand of vaccine make a difference in potential protection against long COVID?

So far, studies have not found that different vaccines have different effects on long-term symptoms.

What are the possible scientific reasons that vaccines might protect against long COVID?

The cause of long COVID is still unclear, and different symptoms might have different underlying causes in different patients, scientists say. Some believe that the condition may be related to remnants of the virus or its genetic material lingering after the initial infection subsides. Another theory is that the continuing problems are related to inflammation or blood circulation problems spurred by an overactive immune response that is unable to shut down.

Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale, has said that vaccines may be able to provide lasting relief in people whose symptoms are caused by vestiges of the virus if the antibodies generated by the vaccines eliminate those remnants.

But in people whose symptoms may be caused by a post-viral response resembling an autoimmune disease, she said, vaccines may help only temporarily, and problems such as fatigue could reemerge.

Can getting vaccinated help if you already have long COVID?

When vaccines were first rolled out, some patients with long COVID were finding that symptoms like brain fog, joint pain, shortness of breath and fatigue improved after they had gotten vaccinated. Still, many people experienced no difference in their symptoms after vaccination, and a small percentage said they felt worse.

A study by the Office for National Statistics in Britain found that in people ages 18 to 69 who reported their symptoms between February and September 2021, a first dose of a vaccine lowered the odds of reporting long COVID Symptoms by 13%. A second dose further lowered the odds by 9%, the study found.

The recent analysis by the British Health Security Agency evaluated that study and seven others that examined whether vaccinating people with long COVID affected their symptoms. It found that in most of those studies, more people with long COVID reported improvement in their symptoms at some point after they were vaccinated. However, some people also reported worsening of symptoms, and in several studies the majority of people said their symptoms were unchanged.

The agency noted that the definition of long COVID varied widely among the studies and that, because all the studies were observational, changes in symptoms could be due to factors other than vaccination.

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HEADLINE	04/26 CDC: 60% population exposed to Covid-19
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/health/cdc-covid-infections.html
GIST	The common perception that nearly everyone in the U.S. seemed to have been infected with the omicron variant in the winter might not have been far from the truth. By February, nearly 60% of the population

had been exposed to the coronavirus, almost double the proportion seen in December 2021, according to data released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“By February 2022, evidence of previous COVID-19 infections substantially increased among every age group,” Dr. Kristie Clarke, the agency researcher who led the study, said at a news briefing.

Infections rose most sharply during the omicron surge among children and adolescents, perhaps because many people in those age groups were still unvaccinated. The increase was smallest among adults 65 or older, who have the highest rate of vaccination and may be the most likely to take precautions.

The new research suggests that three out of four children and adolescents in the United States had been exposed to the coronavirus by February 2022, compared with one-third of older adults.

While some studies suggest that prior infection offers a weaker shield against the virus than vaccines do, exposure to the virus should provide a reasonable degree of protection against severe illness, at least in the short term.

“We still do not know how long infection-induced immunity will last,” Clarke said.

The gains in populationwide immunity nationwide may explain why the new surge that is roaring through China and many countries in Europe has been muted in the United States so far.

The findings may offer some comfort to parents who have been waiting anxiously for a vaccine to be approved for the youngest children. Many of those children now seem to have acquired at least some immunity.

Even so, Clarke urged parents to immunize children who qualify as soon as regulators approve a vaccine for them, regardless of any prior exposure. She noted that when children are hospitalized with the coronavirus, up to 30% of them may need intensive care.

Many of those children also have other medical conditions. But as many as 70% of cases of multisystem inflammatory disease, a rare consequence of COVID-19 infection, occur in children who were otherwise healthy.

“As a pediatrician and a parent, I would absolutely endorse that children get vaccinated, even if they have been infected,” Clarke said.

Coronavirus cases are rising again in the United States, particularly in the Northeast, but so far the rise in hospitalizations has been minimal, and deaths are still dropping.

Even among those who are hospitalized, “we’re seeing less oxygen use, less ICU stays, and we haven’t, fortunately, seen any increase in deaths associated with them,” said the CDC’s director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky. “We are hopeful that positive trends will continue.”

CDC researchers began assessing antibody levels in people at 10 sites early in the pandemic and have since expanded that effort to all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The investigators use a test sensitive enough to identify previously infected people for at least a year or two after exposure.

The researchers analyzed blood samples collected from September 2021 to February 2022, looking for antibodies to the virus; then they parsed the data by age, sex and geographic location. The investigators looked specifically for a type of antibody that is produced after infection but not in people who have merely been vaccinated.

Between September 2021 and December 2021, the prevalence of antibodies in the samples steadily increased by 1 to 2 percentage points every four weeks. But it jumped sharply after December, increasing by nearly 25 points by February 2022.

	<p>The percentage of samples with antibodies rose to about 75% from about 45% among both children aged 11 years and younger, and adolescents aged 12 to 17.</p> <p>By February 2022, roughly 64% of adults 18 to 49, about half those 50 to 64 and about one-third of older adults had been exposed to the virus, according to the study.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Rent prices record highs nationwide
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/rent-prices-hit-record-highs-nationwide/XASG5MJE65GJ7N5J4VBWZTZPFI/
GIST	<p>The cost of living is soaring and even hitting record levels nationwide.</p> <p>A recent study by real estate research firm CoStar shows rent prices jumped more than 11% last year, marking the single highest increase ever recorded.</p> <p>The same report shows some cities like Tampa and Austin experienced more than a 20% increase in rental growth last year.</p> <p>Housing experts say both the pandemic and inflation have impacted rental rates. They say supply chains issues have affected the cost for homebuilding materials like lumber, steel and copper.</p> <p>Experts say these higher rental costs also disproportionately impact African American and Hispanic families.</p> <p>Another factor is a low housing stock. Some studies estimate we're short about 5.5 million homes nationwide which means demand is outpacing supply.</p> <p>But experts say this isn't just a federal issue.</p> <p>"It's a state and local issue, because lot of the factors affecting supply relate to local zoning and land use regulations, which restrict the types of housing that can be built that limit the density of housing, which can be a source of affordable homes," said Dennis Shea, Executive Director of the Terwilliger Center for Housing Policy</p> <p>Shea said one possible federal solution is the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act which would be to offer incentives for developers to build entry level homes in distressed neighborhoods.</p> <p>"Other things like providing incentives for local communities to reform their zoning and land use practices to make them more amenable to building affordable housing, building housing at greater density, which could increase supply and kind of address our affordability challenges," said Shea.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Delta changes flight attendants pay process
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/delta-flight-attendants-boarding/507-b27bc3e4-af99-446e-8322-c43a4b647130
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — Delta Air Lines, which has narrowly fought off several attempts to unionize its flights attendants, will begin paying cabin crews during boarding, a change that is expected to increase their wages by several thousand dollars a year.</p> <p>It is a notable change for U.S. airlines, where pay for flight attendants starts when all the passengers are seated and the plane's doors close.</p>

Delta said the change will start June 2 on all flights. In a memo to flight attendants, the airline said the new pay “further recognizes how important your role is on board to ensuring a welcoming, safe and on-time start to each flight.”

The change comes as Delta plans to increase the boarding time for single-aisle or “narrowbody” planes from 35 minutes to 40 minutes, which the airline expects will increase the percentage of flights that depart on time.

Delta’s pilots are represented by a union, but several attempts to organize the flight attendants have failed in the face of fierce opposition by the Atlanta-based company. The Association of Flight Attendants, which has been gearing up an organizing campaign at Delta for more than two years, took credit for the boarding pay.

“This new policy is the direct result of our organizing,” the union said. “As we get closer to filing for our union vote, management is getting nervous.”

The union said Delta was also responding to employee anger over the longer boarding times, during which flight attendants currently don’t get paid.

Delta said the new boarding pay would be on top of 4% raises that it granted to flight attendants last month.

Unions represent upwards of 80% of workers at American, United and Southwest, but a far lower percentage at Delta.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/26 Fort Worth first US city to mine bitcoin
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/26/fort-worth-tx-the-first-city-in-the-us-to-mine-bitcoin.html
GIST	<p>Fort Worth, Texas, is now the first city government in the United States to mine bitcoin — and in an almost poetic devotion to the initiative, Mayor Mattie Parker oversaw the construction of a small mining farm in City Hall.</p> <p>Three Bitmain Antminer S9 mining rigs will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in the climate-controlled information technology wing of Fort Worth City Hall. The city says the miners will be hosted on a private network to minimize the security risk.</p> <p>Bitcoin operates on a proof-of-work mining model, meaning that miners around the world run high-powered computers to simultaneously create new bitcoin and to validate transactions. The process requires professional-grade equipment, some technical know-how, and a lot of electricity. That’s why Fort Worth’s pilot project is starting small, according to the mayor.</p> <p>Each of the program’s three machines will consume the same amount of energy as a household vacuum cleaner, according to city estimates. While the mayor doesn’t expect the three miners to be major money makers, the cost of electricity needed for the program is expected to be offset by the value of bitcoin mined.</p> <p>Beyond adding bitcoin to the city’s balance sheet, Parker — who took office last year and is the city’s first-ever millennial mayor — believes that leaning into bitcoin will go a long way toward putting Fort Worth on the map.</p> <p>“For Fort Worth, a lot of people don’t know who we are,” Parker told CNBC.</p>

“We want to change that conversation, and we believe that tech innovation including cryptocurrency is the way we’re going to do that.”

Rebranding Fort Worth

Building a three-rig mine, even in a crypto-friendly jurisdiction like Texas, requires clearing bureaucratic red tape.

“This is something brand new for any city,” said Parker. “There’s a lot of policy here that we’ve had to jump through hoops to understand.”

To make it happen, the city has teamed up with a few key partners, including the Texas Blockchain Council, which donated the three mining rigs (each valued at roughly \$600 apiece), and Luxor Technologies, a mining pool, which lets a single miner combine its hashing power with thousands of other miners all over the world to increase their chances of earning bitcoin.

Parker, who has been in the job almost a year, got the idea to break into bitcoin after talking with a few friends in the venture capital world, who told her that 80% of venture capital is essentially spent on tech, and cryptocurrency is at the center of that right now.

“We’re the fastest growing city in the country. There’s so much excitement around North Texas and Fort Worth, in particular. To really keep that energy going, we have to push ourselves differently, and we think cryptocurrency is a huge part of our future economy,” said Parker.

After six months, Fort Worth will re-assess and decide whether to sink real cash into building out a mine.

Alex Brammer, VP of business development for Luxor, says Fort Worth’s move will bolster the legitimacy of bitcoin as a strategic asset.

“Mayor Parker is setting an example and effectively de-risking both bitcoin mining and bitcoin treasury strategies for every other mayor in the country, and I wouldn’t be surprised to see more announcements like this coming in the future,” said Brammer.

Brammer also cited the possibility that governments could use bitcoin mining to help stabilize electrical grids in the transition to clean power.

“In the future, it is likely that bitcoin mines will sit alongside industrial-scale battery storage to provide grid-firming services that prevent blackouts and other interruptions to the grid caused by the addition of intermittent wind and solar generation. In this context, it would make sense for cities to start to fund and build large-scale mining infrastructure themselves.”

Texas Blockchain Council President Lee Bratcher, who works with bitcoin miners across the state, is also optimistic on Fort Worth’s prospects.

“Fort Worth has the geographic proximity to miners and a supportive city leadership that make it a front runner to be the bitcoin mining capital of Texas and therefore the U.S.,” said Bratcher.

For now, the project isn’t really about profits, nor helping to fix Texas’ temperamental power grid. Instead, it’s about being a first-mover and normalizing the idea of a city government mining bitcoin and putting the world’s biggest cryptocurrency on their balance sheet.

“This is outside the box for any government, right? Usually things move at a snail’s pace. And in Fort Worth, we want to do things differently and kind of elbow our way into the room,” the mayor said.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Lapsus\$: script kiddies are okay
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/lapsus-the-script-kiddies-are-alright/

GIST

One afternoon last month, the regional head of security for the identity management platform Okta, an Australian named [Brett Winterford](#), was in the middle of a client meeting when his phone sprang to life. “The first message said, ‘It looks like you’re going to have a bad day,’” he recently recalled. “And the second message had the screenshots.”

“The screenshots” were pictures that a band of hackers had loaded onto a Telegram channel – an encrypted one-way messaging app that, in their case, has some 60,000 subscribers. The screenshots were annotated with helpful captions that read, among other things, “Photos from our access to Okta.com.”

The Telegram messages suggested that the hackers had cracked into an Okta technical support engineer’s account and now had the ability to change passwords, authenticate accounts and put all of Okta’s customers at risk. The last screenshot ended with a smirking emoji.

When asked if he had managed to control his reaction as he digested this during a client meeting, Winterford laughed and said, “I don’t think I have that good a poker face.”

Okta is headquartered in San Francisco and has some 15,000 customers. It offers single sign-on (or SSO) and multi-factor authentication to companies around the world. Much of the important information we never want hacked is meant to be kept safely behind this kind of security wall and some of the world’s largest companies count on Okta to prevent unauthorized people from breaking into their networks.

Typically, Okta users start by logging into their company website and then are required to pass through a series of authentication tests to prove they are who they say they are. In Okta’s case, the company sends a code or an email that requires a response before authorizing entry into a network. That’s why when screenshots suddenly appeared in a Telegram channel that suggested Okta had been compromised, the tech world gasped.

“From the first moment that these screenshots were published, we had two things in mind. One, figure out exactly what happened from a technical perspective, technical impact,” Winterford said, “and two, get in front of our customers and explain to them what had happened.”

As Winterford and his investigators began to unwind the hack, the breach became both less and more troubling. Less troubling because it appeared to be part of an attack that the Okta team had caught and contained two months earlier, in January 2022; and more troubling because the hackers behind it were known to be an unpredictable, hard-to-control, impulsive lot who seemed strangely unafraid of getting caught: [they called themselves Lapsus\\$](#).

“Our threat intelligence team at Okta had been monitoring them,” Winterford said, adding, “we viewed them as the kind of adversary that you could come across just because of how prolific they were.”

ON TELEGRAM, A HACKING GROUP CALLED LAPSUS\$ POSTED A SERIES OF SCREENSHOTS THAT IT CLAIMS WERE TAKEN FROM ITS ACCESS TO “OKTA.COM SUPERUSER/ADMIN AND VARIOUS OTHER SYSTEMS.” THE POST ALSO STATED, “BEFORE PEOPLE START ASKING: WE DID NOT ACCESS/STEAL ANY DATABASES FROM OKTA – OUR FOCUS WAS ONLY ON OKTA CUSTOMERS.”

In just a few short months – from December 2021 up until March of this year – Lapsus\$ had launched a spectacular number of hacks. They began by targeting Brazil’s Ministry of Health. They stole and then deleted 50 terabytes of COVID-19 data stored on its servers and then posted a message to the Brazilian authorities saying that their internal data had been copied and deleted. “Contact us if you want the data back,” the message said, helpfully including email and Telegram contact information.

LAPSUS\$ USED ITS TELEGRAM CHANNEL TO BOAST ABOUT HACKING THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN BRAZIL.

That attack, [according to the cyber security firm Flashpoint](#), was followed by 15 more mostly in Latin America and Portugal.

Then in February, the group shifted focus and set its sights on high-tech firms. They began by stealing source code from NVIDIA, the computer chip maker, and then followed that up by targeting consumer electronics giant, Samsung.

“They seemed to be crafty and resourceful and had a lot of time on their hands,” Winterford said. “And, a lot of folks had remarked that it reminded them of these kinds of groups that just almost love hacking for the notoriety more than anything else.”

Saying they had successfully hacked Okta provided exactly that.

Script Kiddies

It isn’t hard to find the person who is the alleged leader of Lapsus\$. He’s 17 and lives in the U.K. Because he’s a minor, we’re not using his name. We reached out to him and his parents with a raft of emails, and they didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment on this story.

But even without speaking to them directly, it is relatively easy to find out a lot about a hacker who goes by the screen name White.

Allison Nixon is the chief researcher at a cyber security company called [Unit 221B](#) and she’s been tracking White and some of his earlier exploits for quite a while now. She says that even though is just 17, he’s been in the script kiddie hacking world for some time and “his hobbies include re-offending,” she said.

Script kiddies are people who aren’t experts at coding but use other hacking tools – like social engineering – to crack into systems and networks. Traditionally, they haven’t gotten much respect in the hacking world and that may have been, at least in part, what fueled Lapsus\$’ hacking spree. They were intent on proving themselves.

Nixon says once she started digging into White’s online profiles, his historical posts and activity, she found accounts that went back years. “When you read the material and look at the dates of when they were posted, the only conclusion you can come to is that this kid has lots of experience in the criminal underground,” she said.

We found people who knew him who agreed to talk to us, but didn’t want to be named or recorded. They were neighbors and local kids who claimed White hacked their bank accounts, took control of their Xbox’s, and demanded money to open them up again.

Apparently, this had been White’s modus operandi as far back as anyone could remember. When his computers were confiscated in the past, they added, White always found a way to get new ones.

“Because of this ego motivation coloring a lot of their actions, it sabotages a lot of their operations.”
-Allison Nixon, Unit 221b

Nixon says the Lapsus\$ crew – which is thought to be less than a dozen people and mostly adolescents – is different from any other hacking group she’s ever followed. For one thing, they don’t depend on malware. They’ve been known to buy malware on the dark web, but more often they use older techniques and good old fashioned social engineering.

“They are old school,” Nixon said. “They are downloading data, deleting it, and then demanding money in exchange for restoring it.”

There are no elegant malware shells or zero day exploits. Instead Lapsus\$ appears to be really good at finding gullible people who either click on something they shouldn’t, or can be sweet-talked into providing access to something Lapsus\$ should have access to, which presents a huge problem for companies.

Cybersecurity teams can build walls and deploy virus scanners against malicious code, but when the vulnerabilities are carbon units (you know them as human beings), that is much harder to cabin – and is part of the reason for Lapsus\$’s relative success.

Case in point, the old-school schemes on which Nixon believes White cut his teeth: something known as SIM swapping. It involves convincing a cell phone carrier to switch an existing phone number over to a SIM card that the scammer has. Sometimes it requires talking to a customer representative. Other times it can include grabbing tablets from a mobile phone retail outlet and making some quick changes.

Once the SIM swap is made, hackers can complete text-based two-factor authentication checks, steal personal information, or trick services into coughing up passwords. Microsoft said as much after it investigated a [hack back in March](#). The company says it traced a number of Lapsus\$ hacks back to SIM swaps in which the group took control of an employee’s phone number and text messages so they’d get access to those multi-factor authorization codes.

While that might seem like small ball, hacking companies one individual at a time, Nixon says, has made Lapsus\$ appear to be big dog hackers. “The total volume of takeovers is going to be low,” she said. “But the targets they choose are always going to be high profile.” Some estimates say Lapsus\$ has already raked in some \$14 million from its victims just since December.

What is so crazy about all of this is that the Lapsus\$ crew aren’t great hackers in the traditional sense of the word. They aren’t great coders; they are great con artists.

When the investigations team at Okta studied the computer logs from that January hack of the third party vendor, Sykes Sitel, Winterford said it seemed like the group didn’t fully understand what it had cracked into. “They were really just in an experimental mode or a discovery mode, trying to figure out what could, how could they leverage that access in some way,” Winterford said.

They’d try to get into a privileged account in one way... get blocked and then give up and try another. It wasn’t methodical, it was frenetic. “A different kind of adversary might have been more patient and might have performed more discovery,” Winterford said. “These threat actors were very much all about try it out and find out.”

They were a bunch of adolescent hackers who were just out for a joyride, getting an illicit thrill from rattling the cages of high-tech companies.

In fact, those Okta screenshots – the ones that were supposed to ruin Winterford’s day – weren’t exactly what LAPSUS\$ claimed they were. They were not inside Okta’s network, as they claimed. They had compromised one service engineer’s account and sat in on client sessions but their access, by design, was very limited.

“This tool [that they broke into] was built with insider threat in mind and had least privileged access,” Winterford said, adding that to change passwords or authenticate users the hackers needed to have access to a target’s email or already be inside their organizations.

But what fun would there be in saying that?

So Lapsus\$ did what you’d expect a teenager to do: they took strategic screenshots, wrote some creative captions, and made it look like they had just compromised a giant company. Even though, it appears, they didn’t really.

In an [after action report released last week](#), Okta said only two of its customers were compromised. They wouldn’t reveal who they were aside from saying they were medium-sized companies. Winterford said there was only one session of hacking that included them. It lasted about 25 minutes.

But they could only say that definitively months after those January screenshots were taken and weeks after they appeared in the Telegram channel. The damage was done.

“In a sense, they didn’t really need to perform any account takeovers or configuration changes or anything of that nature to have some impact that would make them more notorious,” Winterford said.

Which presents a huge problem: how do you protect your company from what is essentially a hacker disinformation campaign?

While a hacker can swipe source code and hold information for ransom, they also have the power to do something that could be even harder to fix: strike at a company’s reputation.

“There isn’t really a playbook for when a bunch of hackers break into your third party support provider, observe a few client sessions of a technical support engineer, and then take screenshots and publish them on their Telegram channel,” Winterford said. “It’s just not a scenario you come up with for a tabletop exercise.”

At the end of March, the City of London Police announced the arrest of seven people in connection with the Lapsus\$.

A spokesperson for the London police declined to comment on the ongoing investigation, but [police did say](#) publicly that the seven are between the ages of 16 and 21. A short time later, Lapsus\$ announced in its Telegram channel that some of its members were taking a “vacation.”

Nixon says there’s a lesson here: there is a whole crop of young people who have been dabbling at the edges of the hacking world... and they could be waiting in the wings to strike. “The script kiddies are growing up,” she said, adding that SIM swapping methods are being used for more and more high profile attacks.

As if to underscore the point, Lapsus\$ re-emerged at the end of April to announce in its Telegram channel that it had hacked another company: this time it was a software services company called Globant. The group posted a screenshot in its Telegram channel that showed a roster of folder names with brands like Facebook, DHL and C-SPAN.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Conti ransomware activity surges
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/conti-ransomware-activity-surges-despite-exposure-groups-operations
GIST	<p>Conti ransomware activity has surged in the past weeks despite the recent exposure of the group’s operations by a pro-Ukraine hacktivist.</p> <p>An individual claiming to be a Ukrainian cybersecurity researcher has leaked vast amounts of data belonging to the Conti group, including malware source code, chat logs, credentials, email addresses, and C&C server details. The files were leaked in response to the hackers expressing support for the Russian government as it began its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The leaked information showed that the cybercrime gang operates just like a regular company, with contractors, employees and HR problems.</p> <p>While some industry professionals believed the leaks could have a significant impact on Conti operations, that does not appear to be the case.</p> <p>In a recent post on an underground hacker forum, one of the group’s members claimed that the leak has had very little impact on their operations. The cybercriminals are allegedly working on new locker malware, new penetration methods, and new approaches to working with the data they steal.</p>

The forum post was seen by researchers at Secureworks, who noted that the number of new victims added to Conti's "news" website in March 2022 exceeded 70, significantly more than the average of 43 victims per month seen in 2021. Secureworks tracks the Conti group as "Gold Ulrick."

The cybercriminals claim that 50% of their victims pay the ransom, with an average payout of \$700,000. If this is true, the group targeted well over 100 organizations in March and they made millions of dollars.

More than 30 new victims have already been announced on the Conti website in April. Recent attacks targeted wind turbine giant [Nordex](#), industrial components provider [Parker Hannifin](#), and cookware and bakeware distribution giant [Meyer Corporation](#). The group has also taken responsibility for a [highly disruptive attack](#) on Costa Rican government systems.

"If GOLD ULRICK operations continue at that pace, the group will continue to pose one of the most significant cybercrime threats to organizations globally," Secureworks [warned](#).

The recent leaks also shed more light on the relationship between the Emotet malware and Conti. Threat intelligence company Intel 471 has determined — based on an [analysis](#) of the leaked information and its monitoring of Emotet campaigns — that Emotet victims are added to a pool of potential Conti ransomware victims.

The Emotet malware operation is separate from Conti, but Intel 471 research showed that Conti likely relies on Emotet to find many of its victims. Specifically, when Emotet infects a computer, it collects information about that device and sends it back to its operators. The system information harvested by Emotet is used by Conti to select the next victims, and the access obtained by Emotet is also leveraged by Conti.

"While not every instance of Emotet means that a ransomware attack is imminent, our research shows that there is a heightened chance of an attack if Emotet is spotted on organizations' systems," Intel 471 said.

As for Emotet, Proofpoint reported on Tuesday that the cybercriminals are [testing new malware delivery techniques](#).

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HEADLINE	04/26 German wind turbine firm 'targeted'
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/german-wind-turbine-firm-discloses-targeted-professional-cyberattack
GIST	<p>German wind turbine giant Deutsche Windtechnik has issued a notification to warn that some of its IT systems were impacted in a targeted professional cyberattack earlier this month.</p> <p>The incident, which the company says occurred on April 11, forced incident responders to switch off the remote data monitoring connections to the wind turbines for security reasons. Deutsche Windtechnik says it reactivated the connections two days later.</p> <p>"We are very happy that the wind turbines that we look after did not suffer any damage and were never in danger," the company said in a statement.</p> <p>Deutsche Windtechnik also announced that it managed to resume client operational maintenance activities on April 14, with only minor restrictions.</p> <p>The company says all of its IT systems were assessed in a secure environment and the issues were identified and isolated. Furthermore, the wind turbine giant has increased the security of its systems following the incident.</p> <p>"The forensic analysis has been completed and the result has shown that this was a targeted professional cyberattack," Deutsche Windtechnik said. The company says it still hasn't fully restored its systems.</p>

	<p>While Deutsche Windtechnik did not say what type of cyberattack it fell victim to, there is a high probability that ransomware might have been involved, although no known ransomware groups have claimed the attack yet.</p> <p>According to The Wall Street Journal, Deutsche Windtechnik, which lost control of roughly 2,000 turbines during the attack, indeed fell victim to ransomware, but was able to restore its systems without having to contact the attackers.</p> <p>Additionally, the attack on Deutsche Windtechnik happened shortly after wind turbine maker Nordex SE fell victim to the Conti ransomware criminal gang. In early March, wind turbine manufacturer Enercon GmbH lost remote connection to roughly 5,800 turbines after Viasat's satellite network was hacked.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Breach disrupts UK army recruitment
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-breach-disrupts-uk-army/
GIST	<p>The British Army's online recruitment portal has been offline for more than a month following a data breach.</p> <p>Officials shut the computerized enrollment system down in the middle of March as a precaution after the personal data of more than 100 army recruits was found being offered for sale on the dark web.</p> <p>An investigation was launched to determine whether cyber-criminals had hacked into the internal Defense Recruitment System and exfiltrated recruits' personal data.</p> <p>Data reportedly exposed in the incident included full names, dates of birth, addresses, qualifications and previous employment details.</p> <p>"Following the compromise of a small selection of recruit data, the army's online recruitment services were temporarily suspended pending an investigation," said a British Army spokesperson.</p> <p>"This investigation has now concluded allowing some functionality to be restored and applications to be processed."</p> <p>While access to the recruitment system has now been restored, the army continues to rely on its emergency backup methods to recruit new soldiers as the external online recruitment portal is still not functioning.</p> <p>Visitors to the army recruitment login page are greeted with the message that the service is "currently experiencing some technical issues." Candidates with questions about their application or the process are instructed to dial a dedicated phone number.</p> <p>UK defense minister Leo Docherty said: "On Monday March 14, Army HQ were made aware of a breach of information in relation to potential Army candidate data. The breach related to 124 potential candidates whose accounts had been accessed on March 13."</p> <p>On March 21, the Ministry of Defense submitted a formal breach notification to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the body responsible for data protection in the UK</p> <p>A spokesperson for the ICO said that "after making inquiries and carefully reviewing the information provided, we decided no further action was needed at this time."</p> <p>It is unclear what impact the data breach and subsequent shutdown will have on recruitment numbers.</p> <p>Member of parliament Mark Francois, a former defense minister, said: "This security breach is extremely concerning, not least in light of Russia's war in Ukraine and Russia's long history of hostile cyber operations."</p>

HEADLINE	04/26 Scam: AI-generated images to fake law firm
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/new-scam-ai-generated-images-to-fake-law-firm/
GIST	<p>Non-Existent People Posed as Boston Law Firm</p> <p>It may seem like a story straight out of a Hollywood script, but it is indeed true that scammers are using AI-generated images to scam people. According to Ben Dickson of TechTalks, he received an email from a law firm's attorney, which turned out to be fake, and surprisingly, the sender didn't even exist.</p> <p>Details of the Scam</p> <p>In his blog post published in TechTalks, Dickson wrote that on April 13, Nicole Palmer sent an email citing "DMCA Copyright Infringement Notice." The email introduced Nicole as a Trademark Attorney of Arthur Davidson Legal Services and claimed that the recipient had used an image in TechTalks that belonged to one of her clients.</p> <p>"Our client is happy for their image to be used and shared across the internet. However, proper image credit is due for past or ongoing usage," the email supposedly sent by Nicole read.</p> <p>The email contained references to Section 512(c) of DMCA with a professional signature that made it appear legit. If it wasn't done, Nicole threatened legal action against Dickson.</p> <p>How was the Scam Discovered?</p> <p>Dickson spent around 7 days adding credit to that image and a homepage to Nicole's client's website. But, when he couldn't be successful, he re-read the email and identified something off. It was a link to an image-sharing website called Imgur. On this site, anyone can upload images without creating a profile.</p> <p>"So it was perfectly possible that they had downloaded the image from my website, uploaded it on Imgur, and then claimed that their image was there before mine," Dickson wrote.</p> <p>Dickson had taken that image from Pexels, a license-free stock photo library. He emailed Nicole with proof that no attribution was needed and waited for a reply. When he didn't receive a response, he checked out her legal firm Arthur Davidson Legal website, which seemed authentic with profiles of 18 lawyers who graduated from prestigious institutions, 420 cases, and a 90% success rate with 380 wins.</p> <p>A quick Google search didn't yield any results of such a well-known law firm either. Red flags were raised when Dickson noted the website domain was set up in February 2022 while the firm was established in 2009.</p> <p>Later, it turned out that Nicole Palmer didn't even exist because when Dickson checked her photograph on the website, he learned that a generative adversarial network created the image.</p> <p>It is worth noting that in 2019, Hackread.com reported a website (thispersondoesnotexist.com) designed by software engineer Philip Wang that can create realistic faces of people who don't even exist simply by clicking the Refresh button.</p> <p>It is quite possible that Palmer's image was also created using the same website. Nevertheless, watch out for fake emails claiming to represent law firms or threatening people with phony DMCA notices or subpoenas.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Reward: \$10M Russian Sandworm hackers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-offers-10-million-reward-for-tips-on-russian-sandworm-hackers/
GIST	The U.S. is offering up to \$10 million to identify or locate six Russian GRU hackers who are part of the notorious Sandworm hacking group.

This bounty is being offered as part of the Department of State's [Rewards for Justice program](#), which rewards informants for information leading to identifying or locating foreign government threat actors who conduct malicious cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure.

Today, the U.S. Department of State announced that they are seeking information on six Russian officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU) for their alleged role in malicious cyberattacks against U.S. critical infrastructure.

"GRU officers Yuriy Sergeyevich Andrienko (Юрий Сергеевич Андриенко), Sergey Vladimirovich Detistov (Сергей Владимирович Детистов), Pavel Valeryevich Frolov (Павел Валерьевич Фролов), Anatoliy Sergeyevich Kovalev (Анатолий Сергеевич Ковалев), Artem Valeryevich Ochichenko (Артем Валерьевич Очиченко), and Petr Nikolayevich Pliskin (Петр Николаевич Плискин) were members of a conspiracy that deployed destructive malware and took other disruptive actions for the strategic benefit of Russia through unauthorized access to victim computers," the Department of State [announced](#) today.

In 2020, the [Department of Justice indicted all six individuals](#) for being part of the elite Russian hacking group known as Sandworm (also known as Team, Telebots, Voodoo Bear, and Iron Viking).

All six individuals were charged with conspiracy to conduct computer fraud and abuse, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, damaging protected computers, and aggravated identity theft.

Hacking activities associated with the Sandworm group include:

- Destructive malware attacks against Ukraine's electric power grid, Ministry of Finance, and State Treasury Service, using malware known as BlackEnergy, Industroyer, and KillDisk;
- April and May 2017 spearphishing campaigns and related hack-and-leak efforts targeting French President Macron's "La République En Marche!" (En Marche!) political party, French politicians, and local French governments before the 2017 French elections;
- The 2017 destructive malware attacks that infected computers worldwide using malware [known as NotPetya](#), including hospitals and other medical facilities in the Heritage Valley Health System (Heritage Valley) in the Western District of Pennsylvania; a FedEx Corporation subsidiary, TNT Express B.V.; and a large U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturer, which together suffered nearly \$1 billion in losses from the attacks;
- December 2017 through February 2018 spearphishing campaigns and malicious mobile applications targeting South Korean citizens and officials, Olympic athletes, partners, and visitors, and International Olympic Committee (IOC) officials;
- December 2017 through February 2018 intrusions into computers supporting the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games, which culminated in the Feb. 9, 2018, destructive malware attack against the opening ceremony, using malware known as [Olympic Destroyer](#);
- April 2018 spearphishing campaigns targeting investigations by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Kingdom's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) into the nerve agent poisoning of Sergei Skripal, his daughter, and several U.K. citizens; and
- A 2018 spearphishing campaign targeting a major media company, 2019 efforts to compromise the network of Parliament, and a wide-ranging website defacement campaign in 2019.
- The [creation of the Cyclops Blink botnet](#) using a vulnerability in WatchGuard Firebox devices. The U.S. government disabled this botnet before the threat actors used the malware to conduct attacks.
- April 2022 attacks on a large Ukrainian energy provider with a new variant of the Industroyer malware for industrial control systems (ICS) and a new version of the CaddyWiper data destruction malware.

The Rewards of Justice has set up a Tor site at he5dybnt7sr6cm32xt77pazmtm65flqy6irivtflruqfc5ep7eiodiad.onion that can be used to submit tips about these threat actors anonymously, and others.

	The Rewards of Justice is looking for information on other threat actors, including REvil ransomware , DarkSide ransomware , North Korean cybercrime threat actors , and nation-state hackers targeting U.S. businesses and critical infrastructure sectors.
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HEADLINE	04/27 Publicly exposed databases hits new record
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/number-of-publicly-exposed-database-instances-hits-new-record/
GIST	<p>Security researchers have noticed an increase in the number of exposed databases, with 308,000 identified in 2021. The growth continued quarter over quarter, peaking in the first months of this year.</p> <p>In the first quarter of 2022, the amount of exposed databases peaked to 91,200 instances, researchers at threat intelligence and research company Group-IB say in a report shared with BleepingComputer.</p> <p>Exposing databases on the public face of the internet is in many cases due to misconfiguration. Hackers often hunt for them using search engines indexing systems reachable from the open web to steal the content or for financial extortion.</p> <p>Group-IB used its Attack Surface Management solution to scan the entire IPv4 space for open ports relevant for accessing a database and to check if the indexes or tables are available.</p> <p>Tim Bobak, Attack Surface Management Product Lead at Group-IB, told BleepingComputer that the company's solution is limited to checking if the database is exposed or not and it does not have any capability to collect or analyze the content of a database.</p> <p>Telemetry data gathered this way does not show if the open databases are vulnerable to security flaws or if an unauthorized party accessed them while exposed on the web.</p> <p>A growing problem</p> <p>Most of the exposed instances discovered by Group-IB are on servers based in the U.S. and China servers, while Germany, France, and India also have notable percentages.</p> <p>When it comes to the database management system used in the exposed instances, most of them are Redis, with almost double the number of the runner-up in Q1 2022, MongoDB. Elastic accounts for a smaller portion that is still in the tens of thousands, while MySQL recorded the fewest instances detected by Group-IB.</p> <p>These management systems have taken measures to alert admins when they configure instances for public access without a password but the problem persists.</p> <p>Bob Diachenko, a security researcher with specialization on database security, told Bleeping Computer the following regarding the security measures:</p> <p><i>This might be an unpopular opinion, but the more sophisticated measures to protect dbms are introduced by vendors, the more likely there is a chance for misconfiguration and hence an inadvertent exposure of data.</i></p> <p><i>Databases purpose is not only to store the data but also allow immediate and convenient way of sharing this data, its analysis by other team members.</i></p> <p><i>More and more people are involved into database management processes these days, and ultimately they try to ease and speed up the access - so omitting the login process is often the most easiest and obvious way for them.</i></p>

	<p>Unfortunately, it takes admins an average time of 170 days to realize the misconfiguration and fix the exposure problem, which is more than enough for malicious actors to find the instances and siphon their contents.</p> <p>The fixing time was 113 days in Q3 2021, but it has worsened since, likely due to IT personnel being overwhelmed by the rapid expansions of public-facing assets.</p> <p>Exposure of the data not only leads to loss of customer trust and business disruption, but also to major fines imposed by data protection offices for failure to secure sensitive client information.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 American Dental Association in cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/american-dental-association-hit-by-new-black-basta-ransomware/
GIST	<p>The American Dental Association (ADA) was hit by a weekend cyberattack, causing them to shut down portions of their network while investigating the attack.</p> <p>The ADA is a dentist and oral hygiene advocacy association providing training, workshops, and courses to its 175,000 members.</p> <p>For many living in the USA, you will likely recognize the ADA Accepted seal on oral hygiene products, such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, indicating that the product is safe and contributes to oral health.</p> <p>ADA suffers a weekend cyberattack</p> <p>On Friday, the ADA suffered a cyberattack that forced them to take affected systems offline, which disrupted various online services, telephones, email, and webchat.</p> <p>The ADA website now shows a banner stating that their website is experiencing technical difficulties, and they are working on getting systems running again.</p> <p>This outage is causing online services to be inaccessible, including the ADA Store, the ADA Catalog, MyADA, Meeting Registration, Dues pages, ADA CE Online, the ADA Credentialing Service, and the ADA Practice Transitions. The company has also resorted to using Gmail addresses while its email systems are offline.</p> <p>When BleepingComputer reached out to ADA for comment about the attack, we were told that they were just suffering technical issues and were investigating the cause of the disruption.</p> <p>However, emails sent out to ADA members and seen by BleepingComputer paint a much grimmer picture.</p> <p>Last night, the ADA began emailing its members, including state dental associations, practices, and organizations, with an update about the attack and information that can be shared with the recipient's members.</p> <p>"On Friday, the ADA fell victim to a cybersecurity incident that caused a disruption to certain systems, including Aptify and ADA email, telephone and Web chat. Upon discovery, the ADA immediately responded by taking affected systems offline and commenced an investigation into the nature and scope of the disruption," reads an email sent to ADA members and seen by BleepingComputer.</p> <p>The email says that they are working with "third-party cybersecurity specialists" and law enforcement to investigate the attack.</p> <p>"Federal law enforcement has been notified and we are cooperating with them in this active investigation, so we ask for your understanding that we must limit the amount of detail that we can share at this time. In the meantime, we understand you may receive questions about the incident from members," continues the email sent by ADA to its members.</p>

"It is important that we provide members with accurate information regarding this incident. It is equally important that we respond with accurate information while also being cognizant that this is an active investigation."

The ADA's cyberattack is not only affecting their website, but also state dental associations, such as those in [New York](#), [Virginia](#), and [Florida](#), who rely on ADA's online services to register an account or pay dues.

The ADA says that preliminary investigations do not indicate that member information or other data has been compromised. However, the description of this attack sounds like a ransomware attack, and almost every initial press statement says the same thing, with stolen data later published by threat actors.

BleepingComputer has contacted the ADA with further questions about the attack but has not heard back.

Black Basta ransomware gang leaks ADA's data

A new ransomware gang known as Black Basta has claimed responsibility for the attack on the American Dental Association.

Soon after publishing this story, security researcher [MalwareHunterTeam](#) told BleepingComputer that the threat actors had begun leaking data allegedly stolen during the attack on ADA.

The data leak site claims to have leaked approximately 2.8 GB of data, which the threat actors state is 30% of the data stolen in the attack.

This data includes W2 forms, NDAs, accounting spreadsheets, and information on ADA members from screenshots shared on the data leak page.

The leaking of dentists' information can be particularly damaging, as small dental practices typically do not have dedicated security or network admins.

This lack of dedicated IT personnel typically causes their networks to be less secure than larger corporations with a significant security budget.

Due to the potential leak of ADA members' information to other threat actors, it is strongly advised that all ADA members be on the lookout for targeted spear-phishing emails that attempt to steal login credentials or other sensitive information.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Coca-Cola hacked; data breach, theft?
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/coca-cola-investigates-hackers-claims-of-breach-and-data-theft/
GIST	<p>Coca-Cola, the world's largest soft drinks maker, has confirmed in a statement to BleepingComputer that it is aware of the reports about a cyberattack on its network and is currently investigating the claims.</p> <p>The American beverage giant has started to investigate after the Stormous gang said that it successfully breached some of the company's servers and stole 161GB of data.</p> <p>The threat actors listed a cache of the data for sale on their leak site, asking 1.65 Bitcoin, currently converted to around \$64,000.</p> <p>Among the files listed, there are compressed documents, text files with admin, emails, and passwords, account and payment ZIP archives, and other type of sensitive information.</p> <p>Who is Stormous</p>

	<p>Although they claim to be a ransomware group, there is no indication at this time that they are deploying file-encrypting malware on their victim networks.</p> <p>Closer to a data extortion group, Stormous has stated that they would take action against hacker attacks against Russia in the wake of the invasion into Ukraine.</p> <p>This is the first time Stormous has posted a stolen data set. Last week, the gang asked their followers to vote on who should be their next victim.</p> <p>The attack promised denial-of-service, hacking, leaking of software source code and client data. Coca-Cola won the poll with 72% of the votes. The gang said that it took them only a few days to breach the company.</p> <p>Coca-Cola and the other victim choices in Stormous' poll show anti-Western stance. Previously, the group claimed Epic Games as their victim.</p> <p>They announced that they stole 200 gigabytes of data and details of 33 million users of Epic store and games. However, there has been no confirmation about the legitimacy of the data, so Stormous' reputation about these claims has yet to be established.</p> <p>Coca-Cola has not confirmed that their data was stolen. The company told BleepingComputer that it is currently collaborating with law enforcement and that the investigation into the alleged Stormous attack has not revealed a negative impact yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Public interest Log4Shell fades; still a flaw
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/public-interest-in-log4shell-fades-but-attack-surface-remains/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>It's been four months since Log4Shell, a critical zero-day vulnerability in the ubiquitous Apache Log4j library, was discovered, and threat analysts warn that the application of the available fixes is still way behind.</p> <p>Although the public interest and focus of the infosec community have moved to newer vulnerabilities and exploits, Log4Shell continues to be a large-scale problem and a grave security risk.</p> <p>The last time we touched the subject of Log4Shell exploitation was roughly two months ago when a Barracuda report highlighted that it was primarily botnets that leveraged it for DDoS and cryptocurrency mining.</p> <p>However, a new report published today by Rezilion paints a dire picture, revealing a large attack surface across a wide range of software products.</p> <p>This is a severe problem due to its potential impact (remote code execution) and the ease of exploitation (availability of PoCs).</p> <p>A problem that's still there</p> <p>According to Rezilion's report, which presents data from various points, Log4Shell, tracked as CVE-2021-44228, is still present in so many software products that formulating a logical explanation is challenging.</p> <p>For example, when looking into Sonatype's Log4j Download Dashboard, we see that a steady percentage of almost 40% is still downloading vulnerable Log4j versions even at the end of April.</p> <p>While this was previously attributed to security researchers, analysts, or even threat actors testing their exploits, the persistence of the percentage on high levels after all this time excludes these scenarios.</p>

When looking into data from Google's Open Source Insights service, Rezilion found that out of the 17,840 open-source packages using Log4j as a dependency, only 7,140 had upgraded to a fixed version. Hence, 60% of them remain vulnerable to Log4Shell.

When searching for the particular category of open-source containers on Shodan, Rezilion found over 90,000 potentially vulnerable internet-facing apps that contain obsolete versions of Log4j. A notable example is Apache Solr, counting 1,657 public deployments and still using Log4j-core-2.16.0-jar.

Other popular containers patched with a massive delay in April 2022 are Apache Storm and Apache skywalking-oap, while the WSO2 API Manager was patched in March 2022.

Obviously, the latest container versions haven't been adopted by all users yet, so there are still tens of thousands of vulnerable internet-facing deployments.

Then there are those using the obsolete and no longer supported Log4j 1.2.17, including Atlassian Crucible, Apache zeppelin, Bitnami Kafka, and Bitnami Spark. There's a misconception that Log4Shell does not impact the older version branch, but this is not true.

Finally, when looking at Minecraft servers which is the point from where the Log4Shell discovery started, Rezilion discovered 68,000 potentially vulnerable servers.

A possible explanation

Rezilion suggests that today's patching state results from several factors that contribute to the problem, including a lack of proper vulnerability management processes and poor visibility.

Log4j is difficult to detect in production environments, and organizations don't always realize they're using it through third-party software.

In summary, companies don't know if they're using it, don't know which version they use, and don't know which versions are safe to use.

Then there are the various special cases like using granular software update policies on containerized environments that favor operational stability and don't pull the latest available software updates.

Old flaws persist

As CISA's bulletins on the active exploitation of flaws have [repeatedly highlighted](#), hackers don't care about the age of a vulnerability as long as it gets them into a targeted device.

It is often the case that we see 10-year-old bugs still actively exploited in the wild, and Log4Shell looks like an excellent candidate for facilitating the continuation of this practice.

Four months after discovery and patching, Log4Shell is still present, so scan your environment, find which version you're using, and then develop an emergency upgrade plan.

If you find that you were using a vulnerable version all this time, assume compromise and continue on that pathway to scan for signs of malicious activity and uproot any planted backdoors.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Conti, Emotet: destructive duo
SOURCE	https://intel471.com/blog/conti-emotet-ransomware-conti-leaks?&web_view=true
GIST	The relationship between Trickbot, Emotet and Conti has been well documented, with many security researchers showing how threat actors have used the malware combination to launch a plethora of schemes. This relationship has come into greater focus in recent weeks, as the Conti Leaks show just how interdependent Conti affiliates are on Emotet. Through a combination of information pulled from those

leaks and Intel 471's technical monitoring of Emotet campaigns, we now have a clearer understanding on how criminals are using Emotet in concert with Conti.

Intel 471 assesses with high confidence that Emotet malware operators' spam targets will enter a pool of potential Conti victims. Intel 471 analyzed Conti ransomware incidents from Dec. 25, 2021, to March 25, 2022, and discovered over a dozen targets that were recipients of Emotet malspam. While what Intel 471 measured was based on known attacks, the true degree of correlation between Emotet spam recipients and Conti ransomware breach victims may be greater, since not all Conti victims are publicly listed on the name-and-shame blog for a variety of reasons, including victims opting to pay ransoms to remain anonymous. Intel 471 believes it's likely that Emotet is highly relied upon by Conti ransomware operators to find their current victims.

The chart below shows the dates of Emotet showing up on systems, followed by a ransomware attack where Conti was used...(click on source link to view chart)

The negative numbers on the table above indicate that some victims were still receiving Emotet malspam after a ransomware incident was already listed on Conti's blog. This is an important point to highlight as it gives great insight to the overall operation of the Conti ransomware group and Emotet operators.

While Emotet has been linked in concert with Trickbot and Conti, Emotet does not operate under the same leadership umbrella (unlike Trickbot, which Conti "acquired" earlier this year) as the other two forms of malware. The Emotet malspam operation is independent and massive, with some parts running in an automated manner. What's likely occurring is that most Emotet spam recipients are not strictly targeted by a ransomware affiliate using Conti. Instead, Emotet is used by Conti affiliates to gain initial access. Once access is obtained, the organization is placed into a pool of potential ransomware targets, where ransomware operators can select their next victim based on the system information extracted by Emotet.

Even though Emotet operates outside the boundaries of Conti's leadership, the ransomware group has made it a key part of their attack chain, specifically as part of the relaunched Emotet we observed in November 2021.

The previous Emotet operation consistently launched malspam campaigns that dropped several malware families including IcedID aka Bokbot, Qbot and Trickbot. However, the updated Emotet malspam operation has been observed dropping only Cobalt Strike payloads or intermediary payloads, such as SystemBC, to drop Cobalt Strike. We know due to the Conti Leaks that the group leveraged Cobalt Strike: independent journalist Brian Krebs reported that Conti invested US \$60,000 in [acquiring a valid Cobalt Strike license](#) in 2021.

The leaks further revealed evidence that certain members of the Conti team were responsible for handing Trickbot and Emotet development. The leak revealed the actor "veron" aka "mors," who directs the Emotet malware spam operation, reports to a senior manager in the Conti organization, who uses the "stern" handle. This information aligns with our own observations and long-term monitoring of Emotet and TrickBot malware campaigns. In past campaigns, only bots with the Trickbot group tag (gtag) "mors" received commands to download and execute Emotet. This suggests "mors" added the gtag to Trickbot.

When any organization finds a successful operational process, it leans on it as much as possible. The Conti Leaks have shown how this group conducts itself like a legitimate business, adopting well-worn practices that allow it fulfill its goals. These leaks show just how crucial Emotet has been to Conti's ransomware schemes. While not every instance of Emotet means that a ransomware attack is imminent, our research shows that there is a heightened chance of an attack if Emotet is spotted on organizations' systems. By being proactive against Emotet, defenders can save their organizations from further issues that could cause substantial damage to their operations.

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HEADLINE	04/26 DDoS attacks at all-time high
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2022/04/26/kaspersky_ddos_up/?&web_view=true

GIST	<p>Kaspersky has released a report showing Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks hit an all-time-high in the first quarter of 2022.</p> <p>The attacks detected by the security outfit easily surpassed those of the previous quarter and were up 46 per cent on the same time last year. The number of targeted attacks was up by an even higher percentage – 81 per cent compared to the previous quarter.</p> <p>DDoS attacks, as Reg readers know, are designed to disrupt network resources of businesses and public services. They are particularly nasty when compromised systems are depended upon by the wider population.</p> <p>Several Israeli government sites were knocked offline in March as servers buckled under a massive attack and miscreants have continued to make use of vulnerable systems to launch assaults on services.</p> <p>"Q1 2022," said Kaspersky, "saw a sudden increase in attacks in late February as a result of the crisis in Ukraine."</p> <p>Indeed it did. The report showed a spate of DDoS attacks on Russian websites (including those of the media and the government) kicking off from February 24. Responsibility for several attacks was claimed by individuals affiliated with hacktivist group Anonymous. Ukraine institutions and commercial services have also come under attack, with the website of the Mayor of Kyiv attacked and the sites of a number of Ukraine ministries defaced.</p> <p>Russia's response to attacks on its services, according to Kaspersky, has been to fling up geofencing to restrict access from abroad and publish lists of IP addresses from where attacks allegedly originated.</p> <p>As well as attacks arising from Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Kaspersky noted North Korean websites dropping offline following missile tests as well as attacks carried out on blockchain and NFT vendors.</p> <p>Miscreants are also getting ever more creative. Kaspersky noted some demanding bitcoin from victims in exchange for protection against their attacks.</p> <p>However, the major cause of growth is (according to Kaspersky) "the crisis in Ukraine". Without it, figures would actually have fallen relative to the previous quarter. Instead, there was a marked spike, although things calmed down a bit as March wore on.</p> <p>Kaspersky itself has had a bit of a hard time of late. In March it was put on the US Federal Communication Commission's naughty step (apparently unconnected to Russia's activities in Ukraine) and Germany's cybersecurity agency took exception to the company's wares in the same month.</p> <p>Still, the report makes for interesting reading. While Kaspersky noted the spike in DDoS attacks coincided with the conflict in Ukraine, it also noted the US still led the way in terms of attacks targeted against it, with 44.34 percent of attacks, up from 43.55 percent in Q1 2021.</p> <p>Ultimately the advice remains the same – cyberdefenses need to be deployed in advance because once one is under attack, it'll be too late.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Fileless malware delivery eastern Europe
SOURCE	https://securityintelligence.com/posts/hive00117-fileless-malware-delivery-eastern-europe/?web_view=true
GIST	Through continued research into the ongoing cyber activity throughout Eastern Europe, IBM Security X-Force identified a phishing email campaign by Hive0117, likely a financially motivated cybercriminal group, from February 2022, designed to deliver the fileless malware variant dubbed DarkWatchman . The campaign masquerades as official communications from the Russian Government's Federal Bailiffs Service, the Russian-language emails are addressed to users in Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia in the

Telecommunications, Electronic and Industrial sectors. The activity predates and is not believed to be associated with the Russian-led invasion of Ukraine.

X-Force assesses that it is possible the targeting of telecommunication providers and their industry adjacent suppliers may be intended as ultimately serving to enable illegal access to numerous distributed clients and end-users.

DarkWatchman is a malicious Remote Access Trojan (RAT) based on JavaScript, using command and control (C2) mechanisms for [fileless persistence](#), as well as other capabilities.

The phishing activity discovered by X-Force (tracked internally as Hive0117) aligns with research published in December 2021, detailing a similar phishing campaign designed to deliver a [DarkWatchman](#) payload by imitating a Russia-based freight and logistics company.

Given the elevated levels of threat activity associated with the ongoing regional crisis, the evidence may suggest that threat actors will leverage the current climate to conduct and obfuscate further activity.

Hive0117 Activity Assessment

X-Force assesses Hive0117 phishing campaigns are likely criminally motivated in nature given the target selection and focuses of current and previous activities. Additionally, while the target list of the phishing campaign attributed to Hive0117 has regional associations with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the activity predates the invasion, indicating the separate from any politically charged associations that have spurred recent waves of criminal activity, such as the attack on a German subsidiary of a [Russian state-affiliated energy company](#).

Nevertheless, given the evolving nature of criminal activity prompted by the conflict, language capability, target focus, and relative sophistication of the actor, it is likely Hive0117-related activity possesses an elevated threat to entities and enterprises based in-region.

Hive0117 Phishing Activity

X-Force discovered multiple emails that were sent in mid-February 2022 to individual users, including a state-owned communication company based in Lithuania, a prominent Industrial Enterprise in Estonia, and several electronic and telecommunication businesses located in Russia. In some cases, the emails were targeting company owners, as well as individuals in leadership positions associated with Dispatch Services and Sales. Targeted organizations could be of high value to criminal actors given the targets' potential trusted access to wide, and distributed client base.

The emails are crafted to appear to originate from the official address of the Federal Bailiffs Service in Russia, a federal law enforcement agency under the Russian Ministry of Justice; however, header examination revealed that some of the emails were received from shtampuy[.]ru (free.ds [185.64.76.158]). The majority of emails feature the return path address mail@r77[.]fssprus[.]ru, meant to imitate the organization's authentic address <https://r77.fssp.gov>[.]ru. However, for unknown reasons, a single instance imitates a sender which seeks to pose as the head of a purported Russian investment company. The subjects of Hive0117 emails, including official notices, are eye-catching and are likely intended to compel the target to open the email and access the attachment.

The contents of the emails feature identical Russian-language text detailing several articles related to enforcement procedures associated with the Kuntsevsky District Court of Moscow, upheld by the "Bailliff of the Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Execution of Decisions of the Tax Authorities." The only variation observed by X-Force within the emails is in the name and "case number" associated with the individual email and accompanying malicious ZIP archive file attachment.

X-Force assesses that it is possible the targeting of telecommunication providers and their industry adjacent suppliers may be intended as ultimately serving to enable illegal access to numerous distributed clients and end-users.

Return to Top	<p>Malware Payload</p> <p>The emails X-Force uncovered contain archive files either named “Исполнительный лист XXXXXXXX-22.zip”, where the “X” indicates a numeric value, or “Счет 63711-21 от 30.12.2021.zip”, translated respectively to “Performance List”, “Writ of Execution”, and “Invoice”. Each archive file contains an executable of the same name, designed to deliver the DarkWatchman JavaScript backdoor and encrypted source code for a keylogger similarly to the report from December 2021.</p> <p>In addition, X-Force discovered downloader files designed to deliver the DarkWatchman malware, by contacting domtut[.]site fun online and downloading files to %TEMP%. Un execution a self-extracting archive (SFX) installer drops two files: a Javascript (JS) file and a file containing a series of hexadecimal characters. The JS file contains obfuscated code that functions as the backdoor and the hexadecimal data contains encrypted data that when decrypted, contains a block of base64 encoded PowerShell that executes a keylogger. The configuration contains a comment in Russian text, which translates to “The comment below contains SFX script commands” (;Расположенный ниже комментарий содержит команды SFX-сценария), indicating that the author of the malware is a Russian-language speaker, possibly based in, or originating from, a Russian-speaking territory.</p> <p>Given the fileless nature of the malware, coupled with a JavaScript and a keylogger written in C#, and the abilities to remove traces of its existence on the compromised system when instructed, X-Force assesses that malicious actor(s) behind Hive0117 activity are of moderate sophistication.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Bitcoin in 401(k) becomes a reality for more
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/bitcoin-in-401k-becomes-reality-for-more-despite-warnings/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — More workers may soon be able to stake some of their 401(k) retirement savings to bitcoin, as cryptocurrencies crack even deeper into the mainstream.</p> <p>Retirement giant Fidelity said Tuesday that it’s launched a way for workers to put some of their 401(k) savings and contributions directly in bitcoin, potentially up to 20%, all from the account’s main menu of investment options. Fidelity said it’s the first in the industry to allow such investments without having to go through a separate brokerage window, and it’s already signed up one employer that will add the offering to its plan later this year.</p> <p>Fidelity’s offering may be one of just a few for a while, given the substantial concerns about the riskiness of cryptocurrencies. The U.S. government last month warned the retirement industry to exercise “extreme care” when doing something like this, highlighting how inexperienced investors may not appreciate just how volatile cryptocurrencies can be, among other concerns.</p> <p>Bitcoin had five days in the last year where it plunged by at least 10%. The stocks in the S&P 500, meanwhile, had only two such drops in the last 50 years. Beyond its volatility, there’s still fundamental disagreement about how much a bitcoin is worth, or even if it’s worth anything at all.</p> <p>Proponents say cryptocurrencies can boost returns in a well diversified portfolio, without adding too much risk. That’s because cryptocurrencies haven’t always moved in the same direction as stocks and other investments, though they often have in recent months amid worries about rising interest rates.</p> <p>Some investors may believe in all those pros of bitcoin, but still prefer not having to open a new account to buy bitcoin, learn the intricacies of how to store them or deal with taxes on gains made in the years running up to retirement. Or they may come around to that belief soon, and Fidelity wanted to be ready for them, said Dave Gray, Fidelity Investments’ head of workplace retirement offerings and platforms.</p> <p>“We have been developing this, anticipating some of the workforce trends that we see coming,” Gray said. “Our clients expect us to be ahead and developing innovative solutions.”</p>

A big part of the thrill of crypto for some traders is just how volatile it can be. Not only did bitcoin quadruple over 2020, but traders can buy and sell it 24 hours per day. A regular day for stocks on Wall Street, meanwhile, lasts just six and a half hours.

But the new Fidelity account won't offer that. It will update its price once per day, similar to traditional mutual funds. The account will also come with fees, which can range from 0.75% to 0.90% of assets. That means between \$7.50 and \$9 of each \$1,000 invested in the bitcoin account would go toward paying expenses every year. That's less than some specialty investments but more than vanilla stock index funds, which can be virtually free.

Others in the industry are also working to offer similar products. At ForUsAll, a 401(k) provider, the company announced a product in June 2021 to allow workers to put some of their 401(k) in cryptocurrencies by sending it to a self-directed window.

CEO Jeff Schulte said the company spoke with the U.S. Labor Department throughout 2021 about marrying crypto and 401(k) accounts. Even after Labor's stern warning last month, Schulte said he still expects the product to launch this quarter. ForUsAll plans to require savers to take an interactive quiz about the risks of cryptocurrencies before buying them, among other moves to educate investors.

"Protecting investors is paramount," he said. "We believe our solution meets all the fiduciary standards under ERISA," the federal law that oversees retirement plans.

Fidelity also places what Gray calls "digital speed bumps" in front of investors, forcing them to slow down and study the risks and rewards of crypto.

It may take a while for most employers to start offering something like this. The Plan Sponsor Council of America recently asked its members if the Labor Department's warning changed their minds at all in terms of considering crypto.

The majority — 57% — said that they would never consider crypto as a viable investment option regardless. Another third said the warning "simply affirms the concern we already had."

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/27 Terror offenders 'high status' in UK prisons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/27/terrorism-offenders-enjoy-high-status-in-prison-qcs-official-report-says
GIST	<p>Some terrorists in prison enjoy status and celebrity among their fellow inmates amid a culture of fear and violence in jails in England and Wales that is being exacerbated by staffing cuts, an official review has concluded.</p> <p>Jonathan Hall QC, the government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, found that a pecking order of terror offenders can develop, based on the notoriety or charm of an extremist prisoner that means they may be held in high esteem by fellow inmates.</p> <p>"For some prisoners terrorism offences amount to a glamorous blow against the authorities, untainted by grubby personal motives and serving a wider purpose, giving them a distinctly heroic profile," Hall said.</p> <p>Other prisoners may be drawn to some terror inmates by their "personal charm" or they may attracted to Islamist extremism but doubt the sincerity of the prison imam and are seeking what they feel is "a more authoritative version of the faith".</p> <p>Some terror offenders may be seen as lending "credibility" to pre-existing groups in the prison.</p>

The review adds: “The fact that [terrorism] offenders are welcomed, rather than ostracised like paedophiles, is striking in itself, and illustrates the scale of the task in seeking to rehabilitate [terrorism] offenders and persuade them against further terrorist activity, when they are simultaneously enjoying a high status because of their previous offences.”

Hall, who carried out a review of terrorist activity in jails in England and Wales, said this was happening in a “fearful” prison environment where violence was increasing and staff numbers had dramatically diminished over time.

The review said the number of frontline operational prison staff was cut by 26% between 2010 and 2017. Officials say staff went from being “confident and in charge” to “fire-fighting”. Relationships between staff and prisoners deteriorated and everything became a “fight”.

Among the examples of “Islamist gang-type activity” Hall identified was the case of Usman Khan, who stabbed two people to death during the 2019 London Bridge attack while out on licence following an earlier terror conviction. Hall said he tried to make connections with the notorious hate preacher Abu Hamza when they were both in prison.

The review said Khan had “admitted that whilst he was in prison he tried to ‘gain sort of points’ with the terrorist Abu Hamza” by the language he used to refer to non-Muslims to “prove his extremist credentials”.

It also said that “Sudesh Amman, who went on to commit the Streatham attack, considered that he had celebrity status at HMP Belmarsh on account of his terrorist conviction”.

He was automatically released from Belmarsh jail, halfway through his 40-month sentence for obtaining and distributing material used for terrorist purposes.

Amman was shot dead by armed undercover officers after he stole a knife from a hardware shop and began randomly stabbing members of the public on Streatham High Road, south London, on 2 February 2020.

The review added: “It is impossible to avoid the issue of whether increased attention to Islamist groups will lead to Muslim prisoners feeling unfairly singled out when they association with other Muslims. That is clearly a possibility, and an outcome that officials will have to work hard to avoid. Officials should be curious, open-minded, prepared to challenge, listen and explain.”

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HEADLINE	04/26 Germany: terror plot in blackout plan
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/german-prosecutors-suspect-terror-in-extremist-blackout-plan/2022/04/26/80dac88c-c569-11ec-8cff-33b059f4c1b7_story.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — German federal prosecutors on Tuesday took over an investigation of anti-government extremists who allegedly planned to cause a long nationwide blackout and kidnap the country’s health minister, saying there’s evidence that the group constituted a terror organization.</p> <p>Four German men were arrested on April 13 over their alleged roles in the plot, which authorities suspect was aimed at producing “conditions similar to civil war” and ultimately bringing down the government and parliamentary democracy.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors, who in Germany handle terrorism and national security cases, said they were stepping in because there are sufficient indications that the suspects may have founded or been members of a terrorist organization. The men are also suspected of preparing a serious act of violence and violating weapons laws.</p>

	<p>Investigators have said that the suspects were associated with the protest movement against coronavirus restrictions and with the Reich Citizens movement, which disputes the legitimacy of the post-World War II German constitution and, by extension, the current government.</p> <p>Authorities said at the time of the arrests that the group's declared aim was to destroy electricity supply facilities and cause a long blackout across the country as part of its goal of creating chaos. Police seized 22 firearms, including a Kalashnikov rifle, along with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, thousands of euros in cash, and numerous gold bars and silver coins. They also found forged COVID-19 vaccination and test certificates.</p> <p>German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said earlier this month that the investigation pointed to "a serious terrorist threat," and that the plan to kidnap Health Minister Karl Lauterbach and fantasies about overthrowing democracy constitute "a new quality of threat."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Youngest Gitmo detainee cleared to release
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/us/politics/gitmo-youngest-detainee.html
GIST	<p>GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba — The youngest detainee at Guantánamo Bay, a Yemeni man who has spent his entire adult life in U.S. custody, has been cleared for release, the Pentagon disclosed on Tuesday, but must wait for the Biden administration to find a country willing to offer him rehabilitation.</p> <p>At a Periodic Review Board hearing on Jan. 25, an unidentified U.S. military officer described the detainee, Hassan bin Attash, as believing that "his capture and subsequent detention had changed the trajectory of his life." The officer said the now-cleared prisoner was influenced by American culture during his 20 years of detention, which according to a Senate study included at least 120 days at a C.I.A. black site.</p> <p>Mr. bin Attash, who was born in 1982 or 1985, was captured in a Pakistani security services raid on Sept. 11, 2002, along with a defendant in the Sept. 11, 2001, case, Ramzi bin al-Shibh. Mr. bin Attash's older brother, Valid, is also accused of helping plot the Sept. 11 attacks. But Hassan bin Attash has never been charged with a crime.</p> <p>Of the 37 wartime detainees at Guantánamo, 20 have now been provisionally approved for transfer. Twelve have been charged with crimes, including the convicted Qaeda courier Majid Khan, who completed his sentence last month but does not have a release arrangement. Five are indefinite detainees in the war on terrorism, neither charged with crimes nor designated for transfer.</p> <p>The challenge is for the State Department to negotiate transfer deals for the cleared men with countries willing to provide security guarantees that satisfy Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III. Diplomats have arranged just three transfers from the prison since President Biden took office despite an administration goal of closing the detention center.</p> <p>The State Department recently rehired Ian Moss, a lawyer who had negotiated transfers at the office of the special envoy for the closure of Guantánamo during the Obama administration. His title is deputy coordinator for terrorist detention and countering violent extremism, a spokesman said, and he will again arrange transfers.</p> <p>Both bin Attash brothers have been held at Guantánamo Bay since 2006, and are now imprisoned in adjacent buildings but have never been allowed to see each other, their lawyers have said. The only known photo of Hassan bin Attash was taken soon after he was brought to Guantánamo as a young man with a bushy, unkempt head of hair.</p> <p>He is the youngest detainee. Saifullah Paracha, 74, is the oldest, and has been cleared for transfer since May.</p>

	<p>It is not clear where Mr. bin Attash would go. Although a citizen of Yemen, he was raised in Saudi Arabia in a family with several sons who joined the jihad in Afghanistan and found their way to the company of senior Qaeda leaders.</p> <p>The board's decision said that he "presents some level of threat," but that he had been a "positive influence" at the prison. It recommended that he be sent to a country with a "strong rehabilitation and reintegration program" and "enhanced monitoring."</p> <p>Earlier this year, the military officer assigned to advocate for Mr. bin Attash as his "personal representative" told the panel that the prisoner had become so fluent in English, and "comfortable with people of different backgrounds and beliefs," that he aspired to find work as an Arabic-English translator after his release.</p> <p>Mr. bin Attash was approved for release two weeks ago, according to an announcement posted on Tuesday by the Defense Department. The Pentagon offered no explanation for the delayed disclosure, which confirmed accounts posted on Twitter and Facebook by a former detainee and the sister of a current detainee.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/26 China: first human case H3N8 bird flu
SOURCE	https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-reports-first-human-case-of-h3n8-bird-flu
GIST	<p>BEIJING (REUTERS) - China has recorded the first human infection with the H3N8 strain of bird flu, the country's health authority said on Tuesday (April 26), but said the risk of it spreading among people was low.</p> <p>A four-year-old boy from central Henan province was found to have been infected with the variant after developing a fever and other symptoms on April 5.</p> <p>No close contacts were infected with the virus, the National Health Commission (NHC) said in a statement.</p> <p>The child had been in contact with chickens and crows raised at his home, it added.</p> <p>The H3N8 variant has previously been detected elsewhere in the world in horses, dogs, birds and seals, but no human cases of H3N8 have been reported, said the NHC.</p> <p>The commission said an initial assessment determined the variant did not yet have the ability to effectively infect humans, and the risk of a large-scale epidemic was low.</p> <p>Many different strains of bird flu are present in China and some sporadically infect people, usually those working with poultry.</p> <p>China has huge populations of both farmed and wild birds of many species, creating an ideal environment for avian viruses to mix and mutate.</p> <p>Growing surveillance of avian influenza in people also means more infections are being picked up.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/25 How big a problem are nanoparticles?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/25/nano-state-tiny-and-now-everywhere-how-big-a-problem-are-nanoparticles

In 2019, Ikea announced it had developed curtains that it claimed could “[break down common indoor air pollutants](#)”. The secret, it said, was the fabric’s special coating. “What if we could use textiles to clean the air?” asked Ikea’s product developer, Mauricio Affonso, in a [promotional video](#) for the “Gunrid” curtains.

After explaining that the coating was a photocatalyst (“similar to photosynthesis, found in nature”), Affonso is shown gazing up at the gauzy curtains while uplifting music plays. “It’s amazing to work on something that can give people the opportunity to live a healthier life at home.”

Puzzled by these claims – how could a mineral coating clean the air? – [Avicenn](#), a French environmental nonprofit organisation, investigated. Independent laboratory tests of the Gunrid textile reported that samples contained tiny particles of [titanium dioxide \(TiO₂\)](#) – a substance not normally toxic but which can be [possibly carcinogenic](#) if inhaled, and [potentially in other forms](#) – which supposedly gives “self-cleaning” properties to things such as paint and windows when exposed to sunlight.

These tiny particles, or nanoparticles, are at the forefront of materials science. Nanoparticles come in all shapes – spheres, cubes, fibres or sheets – but the crucial thing is their size: they are smaller than 100 nanometres (a human hair is approximately 80,000nm thick).

Many nanoparticles exist in nature. Nano-hairs make a gecko’s feet sticky, and nano-proteins make a spider’s silk strong. But they can be manufactured, and because they are so small, they have special properties that make them attractive across a range of endeavours – not just to companies such as Ikea. In medicine, they can transport cancer drugs directly into tumour cells, and nanosilver is used to coat medical breathing tubes and bandages. Nanos could direct pesticides to parts of a plant, or release nutrients from fertilisers in a more controlled manner.

They also have more mundane uses. Synthetic nanos are added to cosmetics and food. Nanosilver is used in textiles, where it is claimed to give antibacterial properties to plasters, gym leggings, yoga mats and period pants.

But scientists such as those at Avicenn are concerned that when these household items get washed, recycled or thrown away, synthetic nanos are released into the environment – making their way into the soil and sea in ways that are still not understood. Some scientists believe nanoparticles could pose an even greater threat than microplastics.

Synthetic nano particles of plastic have been found in the ocean and [in ice on both poles](#). Nanoparticles from [socks and sunscreen have been found to pollute](#) water, and certain nanos have been shown to negatively affect [marine wildlife including fish and crustaceans](#). As with antibiotics, resistance to antimicrobial nanosilver can develop – [silver-tolerant soil bacteria](#) have now been found.

Little is known even about where nanoparticles are, let alone their effects on the environment. As they are so tiny, most experiments are conducted in labs, and it can be hard to pin down where they are applied.

“The main problem with these substances is that we cannot measure them – we know they are there but they’re so tiny they’re difficult to detect, which is why you don’t hear as much about them,” says Nick Voulvoulis, professor of environmental technology at Imperial College London.

He worries about the uncontrolled use of nanos in consumer products. “If nanos are used properly in applications that are useful or beneficial, that’s justified, but if they are used anywhere and everywhere because they have certain properties, that’s crazy.”

Synthetic nanoparticles are not inherently harmful. Like their natural cousins, many are metal-based, but they can be made of any substance. Crucially, unlike chemical compounds, they cannot be dissolved. Their tiny size gives them, paradoxically, an enormous surface area, which makes them behave differently to “non-nano” versions of the same material. It can make them more mobile, more reactive – and potentially more toxic, depending on shape, size, type, how a substance is released into the environment and its concentration.

And released into the environment they are, on a massive scale. According to Avicenn, the release of nanos is most likely during manufacture or disposal, but it can also happen when items are washed – [which is known to occur with fabrics containing nanosilver](#). Sewage systems cannot trap them and they end up in the ocean: [the OECD](#) says even advanced wastewater-treatment plants cannot deal with nanoparticles.

From a health perspective, inhalation is the most harmful route of exposure to nanos such as TiO₂ for factory workers and consumers. Avicenn's tests concluded that the average particle size was 4.9nm, and all 300 particles analysed were below the official nano threshold of 100nm.

Ikea insisted its own tests showed the TiO₂ particles were “properly bound to the fabric” and “pose no risk” to customers, and said it took workers' safety extremely seriously. The firm has not referred to them as nanoparticles, and said that once integrated into textile surfaces there was “no good standard method to measure the particle size distribution of a material”, acknowledging that EU definitions of nanomaterials were under review.

“We recognise that the tests and measurements of nano-particles are complex, especially for materials containing particles that tend to form agglomerates,” it said.

As for Ikea's curtains shedding TiO₂ nanoparticles when washed or discarded, Ikea said it was “confident that the treatment is properly bound to the fabric, and therefore we do not see a risk of inhaling the treatment”, but acknowledged that “as with any textile, parts of the textile can come off during use or washing”.

Many nanos do not persist for long in the environment. However, because they are consistently being discharged, levels remain fairly constant. “Nanos are ‘pseudo-persistent’ because they degrade quite quickly but they keep entering the environment,” Voulvoulis says.

His main concern is whether nanos become carriers for other compounds, a subject of scientific debate. [In 2009, Spanish scientists suggested](#) nanos could bind to and transport toxic pollutants, and possibly be toxic themselves by generating reactive free radicals. If other toxic pollutants “latch on” to nanos' surfaces, they argued, marine plants and animals could absorb them more easily.

Other scientists suggest the opposite: that organic matter in sewage coat nanoparticles, rendering them less active. And others fear nanos could trigger [“toxic cocktail” effects](#) – making them more harmful in combination than individual substances would be separately.

So far, synthetic nanomaterials are relatively dispersed in the sea, and unlikely to significantly affect marine animals, says Dr Tobias Lammel of Gothenburg University, who has studied [copper nanos](#). But he warns: “It's possible that the concentration of some manufactured nanomaterials in the marine environment will increase ... It is important to keep an eye on this.”

Given the huge question marks, Avicenn wants more stringent regulations on nanos, and more caution in product design. “Companies are eager to sell innovative and fancy products, but they must thoroughly assess their benefits-risks balance at each step of the life-cycle of the products,” says Mathilde Detcheverry, Avicenn's policy manager.

From August, [the EU will ban](#) use of TiO₂ nanos in food (where it is called E171) and the [European Commission recently announced](#) that 12 nanomaterials would soon be prohibited in cosmetics.

Detcheverry says: “As scientific knowledge about the environmental and health impacts of engineered nanos such as silver and titanium dioxide advances, we need to make sure nanos are only allowed for specific and essential uses in order to minimise any adverse effects at the source and [ensure they are] not released uncontrollably.”

	<p>Two years after the release of Ikea's Gunrid curtains, Avicenn tried to buy more for further tests, but they had been withdrawn from sale.</p> <p>Ikea told the Guardian that Gunrid remained "safe to use as a traditional curtain" but it was withdrawn because "the functionality was not as effective as expected". If that's true – for example, that despite TiO₂ having proven photocatalytic properties and being used in self-cleaning and air-purifying products, its efficacy on curtains could be localised and not powerful – then at the very least Ikea's experience suggests nanoparticles' benefits may not outweigh the potential and frequently unknown risks, Detcheverry says.</p> <p>"Nanoparticles are often promoted as silver bullets against pollution or bacteria," she says, "but we must make sure that the cure is not worse than the disease."</p> <p>Gunrid was just one product of many thousands that use nanoparticles. As Ikea's Affonso says in the video: "What's so great about Gunrid is that this technology could be applied to any textile."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Chemical in tire dust killing coho salmon
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/chemical-in-tire-dust-killing-coho-salmon-scientists-warn
GIST	<p>Scientists across the state are warning that a chemical from tire dust poses a major threat to coho salmon. Right now, environmentalists and state leaders are doing work to track this pollutant and find solutions.</p> <p>It took two decades for local researchers from Washington State University, University of Washington, NOAA Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife to figure out that a chemical called "6PPD-quinone" was responsible for killing salmon in urban streams. This contaminant targets coho salmon - a population that is at an all-time low in Puget Sound.</p> <p>"They just expire," said Jacques White.</p> <p>White is the executive director for Long Live the Kings, a non-profit that works to protect northwest salmon. He said this discovery about tire dust - specifically a chemical byproduct from a preservative in car tires - is a game changer.</p> <p>"I thought 'this is the most important finding in salmon management and recovery in the last 20 years, hands down,'" said White.</p> <p>Tire manufacturers said they hadn't known 6PPD-quinone even existed. However, its parent chemical compound 6PPD is touted as a critical safety feature in car tires. Without 6PPD, tires are quickly attacked by ozone.</p> <p>Here's how this all works: when it's raining, the chemical from that tire dust washes away before gushing into drains and running into local creeks and streams.</p> <p>The U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association told FOX 13 they're working on it. USTMA said it's "concerned about this issue and committed to understanding and minimizing the impact of their products on the environment." To read more, click here.</p> <p>USTMA also said it's working to find a potential alternative.</p> <p>"We need tires on our cars and stuff, but we also need to make sure we're doing it in like environmentally safe ways," said Dennis Huang, who lives in Seattle.</p> <p>People we interviewed in Seattle said they had no idea that something as common as tire dust was hurting salmon.</p>

	<p>"I never heard of that, but that sounds like it's something that should be solved," said Huang.</p> <p>"Well, I hope they survive, I mean yeah I mean - what else can you say about that?" said Mark Aytech, who lives in Seattle.</p> <p>Scientists with the University of Washington-Tacoma and Washington State University-Puyallup first made this discovery about a toxic chemical in tire dust at the end of 2020.</p> <p>Since then, researchers, policymakers and activists have been looking for solutions, including things like "biofiltration" systems -- where plants, rocks and organic matter clean out contaminants before the runoff flows into local streams.</p> <p>"So trying to think of ourselves as part of everything that's going on and then being careful about what we do," said James Rasmussen, who is a member of the Duwamish Tribal Council and the superfund manager at the Duwamish River Community Coalition.</p> <p>Rasmussen said collaborating on issues like this are key and emphasizes that caring for salmon is about caring for the entire region.</p> <p>"Just as the salmon are suffering, so do the communities. And so we have to try to take all of those things into consideration," said Rasmussen.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Salmon returning to Green River
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/king-county-tore-out-a-levee-near-auburn-now-the-salmon-are-returning/
GIST	<p>GREEN RIVER, east of Auburn — Alternating bouts of sunshine, rain and hail Tuesday morning couldn't hide the signs of life along this river, where natural habitats have been given a chance to recover thanks to the recent completion of a major restoration project.</p> <p>The \$6.5 million effort — one of the largest of its kind on the Green River — began more than five years ago with King County's removal of an old levee. This, along with the installation of natural blockages, not only reduced flood risk but also rejuvenated aquatic habitats by making the channels slower and deeper.</p> <p>The removal of the levee opened three channels previously blocked from the river and a flood plain spanning nearly 30 acres.</p> <p>Soon after the removal, all kinds of animals — birds, beavers, otters and salmon — began returning to the site "almost instantly," according to Josh Kahan, King County basin steward for the Green River, who joined a cadre of reporters, experts and officials Tuesday on a tour of the area to commemorate the project's completion.</p> <p>"We started seeing small fish come into this channel almost immediately after construction," he said. Construction began with the removal of the levee in the summer of 2018. "We started seeing large numbers of fingerlings come into these channels that they were excluded from."</p> <p>A representative of the Muckleshoot Tribe, which has treaty-protected fishing rights on the Green River, proposed the site be named čakwab, pronounced "chock-wob," a fitting title that means "to bring something to the water."</p> <p>The levee that used to impede this segment of the Green River was nearly a third of a mile long and 60 feet wide. For years it blocked access to river channels that gave salmon and other fish an escape from seasonal high waters.</p>

	<p>Trees that had been growing atop the levee were removed and distributed throughout the plain and now are potential habitats for rearing salmon. Revetments, or retaining walls, and logjams can minimize erosion and flood risk.</p> <p>“We have really altered this landscape a lot over many decades and centuries, and we have an obligation to make it better,” Christie True, director of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, said Tuesday.</p> <p>King County Executive Dow Constantine joined the tour, saying that with millions of people living on the land it was our job “to work with nature to restore these systems to as natural a state as possible.”</p> <p>Together, the Lones Levee setback and flood plain restoration project could breathe new life into one of the region’s most important bodies of water.</p> <p>The Green River, a 65-mile-long tributary born of the western slopes of the Cascades, boasts one of the top three salmon runs in the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>The river flows into the Duwamish River before it reaches Puget Sound. Chinook, steelhead and other salmon species use it as a spawning ground before setting out for the ocean, where orca depend heavily on salmon for survival.</p> <p>Salmon restoration efforts won a major victory last month when an additional \$220 million in federal funding was secured for fish passage at the Howard Hanson Dam along the Green River east of Auburn. The passage would help unlock more than 100 miles of salmon habitat.</p> <p>The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which found the dam jeopardizes the survival of both threatened Puget Sound Chinook and endangered southern resident orcas, said the fish passage must be operational by 2030.</p> <p>Salmon have been blocked from the upper Green River since the early 1900s, when the Tacoma Headworks Diversion Dam became operational.</p> <p>The restoration project commemorated on Tuesday, below the dam, is part of a larger effort to make the Green River more accessible as a watershed, not only to salmon and killer whales but for the ecosystem in its entirety.</p> <p>Kahan said the total cost of the project could reach \$7 million but, moving forward, monitoring the site to gauge the impact of the project will be key. Traditionally, county staffers are dispatched to sites before, during and after such projects. Doing so will help researchers understand the long-term ecological and topographical effects of the levee removal and habitat restoration.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Experts rethink preventative aspirin
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/aspirin-longer-recommended-prevent-1st-heart-attack-stroke/story?id=84300242
GIST	<p>For years, doctors recommended people in their 50s start taking baby aspirin every day to protect against heart attacks and stroke. But in recent years, with new evidence of the possible harm of daily aspirin, health experts shifted those recommendations.</p> <p>In major new guidance, an influential physician task force no longer recommends daily aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke among people 60 and older. Meanwhile, the new guidance said people 40 to 59 should only take it if they have a high risk of cardiovascular disease, and in consultation with a doctor. There is little benefit in continuing aspirin beyond the age of 75 years old, experts concluded.</p>

The new guidance comes from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an influential physician group that helps guide medical best practices.

Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death in the United States, accounting for more than one in four deaths. While daily aspirin use has been shown to lower the chance of having a first heart attack or stroke, it can also increase the risk for bleeding in the brain, stomach and intestines. Although the absolute risk of a bleeding event is low, the risk increases with age.

"Based on current evidence, the task force recommends against people 60 and older starting to take aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke," task force vice chair Dr. Michael Barry, professor of Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, told ABC News. "Because the chance of internal bleeding increases with age, the potential harms of aspirin use cancel out the benefits in this age group."

"People who are 40 to 59 years old and don't have a history of cardiovascular disease but are at higher risk may benefit from starting to take aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke," task force member Dr. John Wong, interim Chief Scientific Officer and Professor of Medicine at Tufts Medical Center, told ABC News. "It's important that they decide together with their healthcare professional if starting aspirin is right for them because daily aspirin does come with possible serious harms."

"It is important for the public to understand that for the vast majority of Americans without pre-existing heart disease, aspirin does not provide a net benefit. The harms are approximately equal to any benefits. The USPSTF is just catching up with this widely accepted scientific viewpoint. For nearly 20 years the FDA has advised against routine use of aspirin for prevention in patients without heart disease," Dr. Steven Nissen, cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic, told ABC News.

The new recommendations were aimed at people who have not yet started taking a daily aspirin. The panel of experts did not issue guidance for people who are already taking a daily aspirin, and the updated news does not necessarily mean people should stop taking it if prescribed by a doctor.

"We want to emphasize that these recommendations are focused on starting aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke. Anyone who already takes aspirin and has questions about it should speak with their healthcare professional," Wong said.

The new guidelines do not change for people who have had a heart attack, stroke or other major cardiovascular issue. The recommendation for using aspirin to protect them from a second event remains strong.

Recommendations on daily aspirin to prevent disease have shifted in recent years. In 2016, the preventive services task force recommended people in their 50s at risk for heart disease take baby aspirin to prevent both cardiovascular disease and colon cancer. But updated recommendations based on additional research found benefits may not outweigh the risk, concluding the best colon cancer prevention is routine screening beginning at the age of 45.

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HEADLINE	04/25 Allergy season is about to get worse
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/21/well/live/allergies-symptoms-season.html
GIST	<p>Springtime comes with an uptick in stuffy noses and scratchy throats, and for many it has nothing to do with COVID-19. There are 19.2 million adults and 5.2 million children in the United States who suffer from seasonal allergies, also called hay fever, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Some of the symptoms of allergies, like congestion, coughing and a runny nose, overlap with warning signs of COVID-19, but if your nose turns into a leaky faucet every spring, then allergies are the likely culprit.</p>

Unfortunately, that's where the good news ends. Several studies show that pollen seasons are getting longer and more intense across the country. Climate change and rising carbon dioxide emissions are expected to boost the growth of trees and grasses in many areas, which will mean higher pollen concentrations.

"For people who have been managing seasonal allergies for a long time, they may have already noticed allergy symptoms starting earlier, lasting longer and being more intense than even a few years ago," said Kenneth Mendez, the president and chief executive of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

In the Southeast, pollen counts start rising as early as January for some trees, including cedar and juniper. Elm, maple and oak trees have pollen seasons that can run from March to May. And in the northern United States, several types of grasses also start releasing pollen in late spring or early summer, according to the AAFA. (Though flowers are often blamed, they don't usually trigger seasonal allergies because their pollen is large and sticky, designed to attract insects rather than float through the air.)

You cannot avoid pollen entirely, but there are ways to prevent or reduce symptoms. And you may just have to take these steps a little earlier every year, Mendez said.

Find Medication That Works for You

Several over-the-counter and prescription medications can help with allergy symptoms. Many doctors recommend nasal steroid sprays like Nasonex (with a prescription) or Flonase as the first line of treatment, said Dr. Sandra Hong, an allergist at the Cleveland Clinic.

But they may take a few days or weeks to provide relief from stuffiness and sneezing, so it is best to begin using them early in the season, before your symptoms become severe. Antihistamines — whether sprays like Astelin; pills like Allegra, Claritin or Zyrtec; or eye drops like Optivar — are other alternatives to take when needed, because they have a more immediate effect, she said.

Decongestants like Afrin or Sinex can also come to the rescue in a pinch. But Hong recommended these drugs last because they can have a rebound effect. After a few days of using decongestants, the blood vessels in your nose become less responsive to the medication and you may feel severe congestion again. So limit these medicines to no more than three days in a row.

It takes some trial and error to find the best medication regimen. "If patients have tried one medication and it doesn't seem to be working for them, they should absolutely try other types to see if they're more effective," Hong said.

You should also talk to your doctor about prescription options if you have already tried several over-the-counter allergy medicines. An allergy specialist can help you formulate a plan for your specific allergies ahead of time.

Give Your Sinuses a Bath

For a medication-free option, consider nasal irrigation. The practice traces back thousands of years to the Ayurvedic medical traditions of India and its effectiveness is backed by research. To try it yourself, use a neti pot, bulb syringe or squeeze bottle and pour a saline solution in one nostril, letting it drain out the other.

"It seems like a simple concept, but it helps flush out mucus, pollen and other allergens in your nasal cavity," said Dr. Laura Chong, an allergist at the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic in Oklahoma City.

The result is that you feel less congested and you may need less allergy medication, Chong said.

Plan Time Outdoors Wisely

Many popular weather apps and websites provide "allergy forecasts" or pollen counts. On the [National Allergy Bureau website](#) there is a list of more than 80 stations throughout the United States that provide more

detailed daily pollen updates based on different species of plants. You can select the station closest to you and receive notifications for the particular pollen allergy you have.

Pollen counts tend to be at their highest between early morning and midmorning, as well as on hot, dry, windy days, Chong said. If you can exercise indoors during those times or run errands later in the evening, you will reduce the amount of pollen you inhale, she added.

If you are prone to allergy symptoms and have to go out in the morning or do yardwork, wear a high-quality N95 mask — the kind you may already have for protection against the coronavirus. This will help filter out pollen.

Reduce Pollen at Home

Avoid bringing pollen back inside after you have been outdoors. Take your shoes off and change your clothes when you get home. Shower before going to bed to remove pollen from your body. And don't have your furry pets sleep with you, Hong said. "Even if you're not allergic to your pets, there is pollen on their coats."

In order to sleep better, you can try zipping up your mattress and pillows in hypoallergenic encasements, washing bedding in hot soapy water once a week and using a dryer instead of a clothesline.

Hong also recommended cleaning and replacing your air-conditioner filter with one that has a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) of 11 or higher. These filters are capable of capturing tiny pollen particles. If you have severe allergies, you may even want to splurge for a professional-style HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter in your bedroom. HEPA filters typically have a MERV rating of 17 or higher and remove 99% of pollen, as well as animal dander, dust and other particles.

Consider Allergy Immunotherapy

If allergies are taking a toll on your everyday life, you may want to talk to your doctor about immunotherapy for long-term relief.

After confirming exactly which types of pollen you are allergic to with a skin prick exam or blood test, your doctor may recommend subcutaneous allergy immunotherapy, or allergy shots. This involves a series of injections given every week or every month containing minuscule amounts of the pollen you are allergic to. The dose is gradually increased, helping your immune system become less sensitive to the allergen over time.

In the past decade, the Food and Drug Administration has started to approve another form of immunotherapy, known as sublingual immunotherapy. Here, tiny amounts of pollen come in tablet form, placed under the tongue for one to two minutes and then swallowed as they dissolve. Currently, the only approved tablets are for allergies to dust mites, ragweed and northern pasture grasses like timothy, although more tablets are being tested in clinical studies.

Both types of immunotherapy require patience. It may take six months or a year to see a reduction in symptoms, Hong said. Still, you may need to stay on the treatment for three to five years before your body can reliably ignore your triggers.

When it works, immunotherapy can be amazing, Hong said. People who once suffered yearly stuffy noses and itchy eyes can, after successful treatment, enjoy the spring again.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/26 Chaos, gang violence again erupt in Haiti
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SOURCE	https://gazette.com/ap/international/chaos-gang-violence-again-erupt-in-haiti-even-the-nation-s-disarmament-chief-is-a/article_245ca2ae-cdde-570f-b62a-cfd45503c683.html
GIST	<p>Chaos and violence is once more erupting in Haiti, where armed clashes between warring violent gangs are once more forcing residents to flee their homes under a hail of bullets.</p> <p>How dangerous are things right now? The head of the country's disarmament commission narrowly escaped harm Tuesday morning along with his driver when their car was hit with a spray of gunfire.</p> <p>A United Nations helicopter was reportedly hit with a bullet while parked on a runway in Port-au-Prince. A photo of the damage was making the rounds on social media. The helicopter is used to ferry UN workers to remote locations in the country.</p> <p>The state of siege on the eastern edge of the capital began around 4 a.m. Sunday, say residents, and have stalled everything from public transportation to the operation of street markets between Croix-des-Missions and Bon-Repon, the sprawling encampment where victims of the 2010 earthquake sought refuge after the disaster.</p> <p>"We are practically paralyzed here," said a local resident and pastor named Steeve, who declined to give his last name, and was marking his third day separated from his family because of the shootings. "We cannot do anything."</p> <p>It is unclear how many people have died or been shot since the violence broke out — neither police nor members of the government have made any official statements, and the Haiti National Police spokesman did not respond to a phone call.</p> <p>Human Rights group contacted by the Miami Herald say it's "impossible" to know at the moment how many casualties there have been, and they are still trying to understand what's behind the violence.</p> <p>The violence is the latest chapter of chaos in a politically unstable and volatile Haiti where for days, long lines have been forming at fueling stations because of empty tanks; and security issues over the weekend led to U.S. airlines delaying takeoff after they were informed there was no jet fuel at the Toussaint Louverture International Airport and they would need to bring their own.</p> <p>In one instance, an American Airlines flight was forced to refuel in neighboring Santo Domingo before heading back to Miami.</p> <p>"Haiti is blocked," said Pierre Espérance, a leading human rights defender, who said his National Human Rights Defense Network counted several dozen residents at a public park who were forced to leave their homes because of the shooting.</p> <p>"We are in a situation where the only thing you can think about is your security. Not schooling, not anything else. There is no living here. The insecurity situation has paralyzed the country ... If you don't have a need to go out in Haiti, you don't go out."</p> <p>Last week, a group of U.S. lawmakers including representatives Gregory W. Meeks and Michael McCaul, chairman and ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, issued a letter condemning death threats against Espérance and the staff of his National Human Rights Defense Network.</p> <p>The threats against Espérance were in retaliation for his work, the letter said, and "are extremely alarming."</p> <p>"Any further attempts to silence, intimidate, harass, threaten, or cause harm to Mr. Espérance or RNDDH staff are intolerable," the letter said. "We call on the Haitian authorities to investigate any threats made against Mr. Espérance and take all necessary steps to ensure his safety and the safety of his colleagues."</p>

In addition to Espérance, the outspoken head of a disarmament commission, Jean Rebel Dorcenat, said Tuesday that he was also “under a threat of violence,” after his car was shot up by unknown individuals. Dorcenat said the incident occurred Tuesday morning and he and his driver were unharmed.

Residents in the neighborhoods currently under gang attack have described the violence as “shocking” and “scary.” It is fanning fears, they say, that the sprawling area of Croix-des-Bouquets and La Plain, which connects the capital to the Central Plateau and the border with the neighboring Dominican Republic, could become Haiti’s next No Man’s Land after Martissant, the gang-ridden neighborhood to the south.

Since June, armed groups have forced the displacement of over 20,000 Haitians from their homes in Martissant and surrounding communities, and cut off Port-au-Prince from four regional departments in the south, including those devastated by last year’s deadly earthquake. The violence has made it impossible for anyone to cross without risking being kidnapped or killed.

In the cases where people have been able to cross, they’ve had to pay gangs for passage, which still offers no guarantees against violence.

Should Croix-des-Bouquets fall completely into the hands of gangs, it would leave Port-au-Prince with just one access, its northern entrance, to the rest of the country. And even there, there are no guarantees, with gang clashes near the seaport and airport also turning deadly at times.

At the center of the current violence are two gangs: One is known as Chen Mechan, which translate to “Naughty Dog,” and they other is 400 Mawozo, the armed group that was behind last year’s kidnapping of 17 missionaries who worked for an Ohio-based charity and a group of Catholic clergy earlier in the year. The gangs are said to be fighting over territory after 400 Mawozo tried to install one of its leaders in the other gang’s territory.

A voice note circulating on social media has warned the Haitian police to stay out of the fight.

Esperance said while police officers are implicated in that they have close ties to gang members, the Haitian authorities need to remove the power from the gangs by cracking down on the illegal importation of arms and ammunition at the country’s seaports, especially the main port in Port-au-Prince.

Until then, residents like Steeve say they are being held hostage to the violence.

“That is our biggest worry,” he said, wondering out loud if he will be able to find a motorcycle to take him to go see his four traumatized kids and wife in nearby Tabarre, the same Port-au-Prince suburb where the U.S. Embassy is located. H knows people who have been shot, Steeve said, and his brother’s house was hit with a bullet.

“The people today have no refuge,” Steeve said. “Nowhere is safe in Haiti.”

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HEADLINE	04/27 Juvenile arrested in death of 10yr-old girl
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/25/us/lily-peters-wisconsin-homicide-investigation/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Police in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, arrested a juvenile suspect in connection with the death of 10-year-old Illiana "Lily" Peters, Police Chief Matthew Kelm said Tuesday night.</p> <p>"The suspect was not a stranger, the suspect was known to the victim," Kelm told reporters. "We do not believe there is any danger to the community at this time."</p> <p>The chief neither released the name of the suspect nor how the suspect and Lily knew each other. He said the juvenile is in custody. Kelm did not say whether criminal charges had been filed.</p> <p>The arrest comes one day after Lily's body was found in the woods, prompting police to launch a homicide investigation.</p>

Lily's father called the police Sunday night when she did not come home from visiting her aunt's house, the Chippewa Falls Police Department said in a news release Monday. Later that night, officers found a bicycle in a wooded area by a walking trail that is close to her aunt's house and near the Leinenkugel's Brewery Parking lot, said police.

Around 9 a.m. Monday, her body was found in the woods near the walking trail, said police. The Chippewa County Coroner's Office confirmed the remains were Lily's.

Officers believe Lily was last seen by family members the night of her disappearance, said the news release. She was supposed to be headed home from her aunt's house when she disappeared, said police.

Overnight, authorities searched for Lily by going door to door and using K9 teams. They used a drone to search the wooded area where her bike was found.

At a news conference Monday, Kelm did not elaborate on how the girl was killed or what evidence was found at the scene. Kelm said Tuesday authorities received more than 200 tips.

"These tips were critical to solving this case," he said.

A search warrant was executed at a home where evidence was collected and additional interviews were conducted, Kelm said Tuesday.

"There is still much work to be done," he said. "Our thoughts continue to be with the family during this terrible time."

Marty Maloney, spokesperson for Leinenkugel's, told CNN in a statement Lily's death was "an unspeakable, heartbreaking tragedy, and we want to express our deepest condolences to the family and friends of the victim. We are working with the authorities, and providing the help and support we can."

In a message to parents on Monday afternoon, the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District said its buildings are on "high alert," but that law enforcement didn't indicate the need for a lockdown.

Police on Tuesday announced an increased presence around Chippewa Falls schools. "We will be increasing our patrol especially during drop-off and pick-up times," the department said in a statement.

The district is recommending that students who walk to school be picked up and dropped off by trusted family members or friends "until further notice," and parents are asked to be "more vigilant and alert during this time."

In a message sent to school staff, administrators asked that teachers "respect the family by not spreading rumors."

Teachers are encouraged to make sure older students are sensitive toward younger students who may not know what happened.

Michael Houle, a senior pastor at Valley Vineyard Church in Chippewa Falls, where Lily's relatives are members, has opened the church's doors to the community as a safe space to grieve, he told CNN.

"Our mission is to reach out to our community in a positive way and to be a light in Chippewa Falls during this difficult time," he said. "We live in very generous town. Our community is coming together to meet the needs of family, community members, schools, and first responders. This is just the start and will be an ongoing process over the next weeks."

Multiple agencies are assisting in the investigation, including the Wisconsin Division of Criminal Investigation and the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratories, Kelm said. Lily's family is working with victim

	advocates, said Kelm, and the school district, where she attended fourth grade, said in a Facebook post it is "working closely with the police."
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HEADLINE	04/27 NYC hammered by unrelenting crime
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/nyc-mayor-adams-crush-crime-predecessor-bill-de-blasio
GIST	<p>New York City Mayor Eric Adams said in a recent interview that "everything crumbles" in the absence of public safety, but experts tell Fox News Digital that bringing law and order back to the nation's largest city will likely take longer than some realize.</p> <p>Meanwhile, gruesome, violent crimes continue to terrorize unsuspecting residents — often at random — with New Yorkers hoping they won't become the next victim.</p> <p>Total crime in New York City was up 42.8% this year as of Sunday compared to the same time last year, according to the most recent batch of New York Police Department statistics. The NYPD saw increases in six of the seven total "index" crimes. Rapes, robberies, felony assaults, burglaries, grand larcenies and grand larceny autos were all up, while murders were down 13.1%, data show.</p> <p>The number of shootings was up slightly by 8.6%, and the number of wounded victims increased by 2.2%.</p> <p>Meanwhile, transit crimes jumped 65.3% year-to-date as of Sunday, with 706 reported this year compared to 427 for the same period in 2021, police said.</p> <p>After the month of March showed an overall index crime increase of 36.5%, the NYPD described how the city's administration was capping "an historic period for an administration approaching its 100th day in office," according to a press release from early April.</p> <p>On Tuesday, during an event highlighting his first 100 days in office, Adams announced he would allocate \$256 million to public safety.</p> <p>"We cannot have a city where people are afraid to walk the streets, ride the subway or send their children to school," he said. "We will do what is necessary to make all of our communities safe. You have my word as a former police officer, a fellow New Yorker and as your mayor."</p> <p>When he took office in January, Adams had already spent months running on the platform that he would crush crime and return law and order to the city.</p> <p>"It's a ship that's been holding steady and slowly taking in water," Eli Silverman, a professor emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, said. "It's going to take a while to retool that ship."</p> <p>Silverman attributed the rise in crime to a "combination of factors," including "a fall-off" from the practices of Adams' predecessor, Bill de Blasio.</p> <p>"Police have increasingly felt ignored, in some cases disrespected, by their politicians. And also the backlash against police departments in general, with these terrible incidents and the rise of Black Lives Matter has made police in general more cautious," he told Fox News Digital.</p> <p>Silverman added that district attorneys who have "relaxed the penalties for low level crimes" have contributed to the problem.</p> <p>"The problem is we're entering the summer, when crime usually spikes up," he said.</p> <p>Silverman, who also co-authored a book, "The Crime Numbers Game," said it was too soon to pin the high crime numbers on Adams, a former cop, himself, adding a "honeymoon for a new mayor is not that long."</p>

Since he took office, Adams has reinstated the NYPD's gun-focused anti-crime unit under a different name, unveiled his "Blueprint to End Gun Violence," launched a plan to try to clean up the subways and rolled out a new strategy aimed at targeting low-level crime offenders in an effort to stem violent crime before it starts.

Silverman said at least one of Adams' policies, the "Blueprint," was "strong in generalities."

In the beginning of February, Silverman and a colleague, co-author and retired NYPD Captain John Eterno, penned an op-ed in the [New York Daily News](#), in which they said Adams' "Blueprint" was promising — but has major gaps."

"He doesn't explain how money is to be spent or what targets are to be reached. This plan confers no personal accountability to any individuals. Even a blueprint should reference data and a basic understanding of how it is to be accomplished," the pair wrote. "In the past, such altruistic plans look wonderful on paper but fail to attain results."

Adams has often been outspoken about his plans and efforts in fighting crime.

In early January, after city resident [Michelle Alyssa Go was fatally shoved](#) in front of a train in a busy Manhattan station, Adams said the young woman's death "just really doubled down on our concerns that our system must be safe."

"Must be safe from actual crime, which we are going to do," [he said](#). "And it must be safe from those who feel as though there's a total level of disorder in our subway system."

[When an 11-month-old girl was caught](#) in the crossfire and shot in the head at the end of January, an incensed Adams told reporters, "It is unimaginable that this is happening in our city."

"I'm going to stay in these streets until this city is safe," he said at the time. "I'm not going to surrender this city to violence."

Weeks later, he [tearfully called on city agencies](#) to do more to help youth who are at risk of becoming embroiled in lives of crime. He said the city "must step up, save the children who are falling through the cracks upstream."

During an interview with CBS 60 Minutes, which aired Sunday, Adams said, "If you don't have public safety, everything crumbles.

"And I have to make sure the city's safe," he added.

On Tuesday, Adams said city law enforcement has taken 2,300 illegal guns off the streets since he was elected. Overall subway arrests are up 63% this year compared to 2021, and the [New York Police Department](#) has executed an estimated 60% of arrests in connection with the assaults on city workers, NYPD Transit Chief Jason Wilcox said during an MTA board meeting on Monday.

A spokesperson for his office previously told Fox News Digital that public safety is Adams' "top priority."

"He's working every day to remove guns from our streets, protect our communities and create a safe, prosperous and just city for all New Yorkers," the spokesperson said in an email earlier this month. "As the mayor has said, he is focused on both reducing crime in the city, as well as the perception of crime. This won't be done overnight, but we are taking some of the biggest actions in years to protect New Yorkers because we will never stop fighting to protect the residents of this city."

New York City Council Member Joe Borelli said Adams "is right to make crime his No. 1 focus."

	<p>"And until we see our rates drop, it has to be the only thing that he talks about," he added.</p> <p>Borelli, a Republican and New York City Council Minority Leader, said he empathizes with Adams and the NYPD, whose efforts are stymied by state bail laws that allow gun offenders in some cases to be released just hours after being arrested.</p> <p>"Until there's a serious redress of the constant recidivism by criminal offenders, I'm afraid to say that the NYPD won't be able to arrest our way out of the problem," Borelli told Fox News Digital. "If we're letting people out within hours, there's almost nothing we can do."</p> <p>He added that the "bigger problem" was not a lack of police enforcement, but the lack of criminal justice accountability.</p> <p>"Our last mayor spent eight years trying to artificially lower the population of Rikers Island," Borelli said. "And New Yorkers are just starting to realize that there was a good reason why many of those people were actually stuck on Rikers Island."</p> <p>Former NYPD Commissioner Howard Safir expressed similar thoughts as the other experts. He said fixing New York City's crime problem will take time, as Adams must pick up the pieces of a New York City still reeling from his predecessor.</p> <p>"What Mayor Adams has to do is correct eight years of causing crime to go up from a Mayor de Blasio who sent signals [to] criminals that it was OK to commit crimes in New York," Safir told Fox News Digital by phone.</p> <p>"It's not going to take long for crime to continue to increase if the NYPD doesn't do very assertive and effective policing. And that's what Mayor Adams has promised, and I hope that's what he's going to do."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Academics hunted down Syria war criminal
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/27/massacre-in-tadamon-how-two-academics-hunted-down-a-syrian-war-criminal
GIST	<p>On a spring morning three years ago, a new recruit to a loyalist Syrian militia was handed a laptop belonging to one of Bashar al-Assad's most feared security wings. He opened the screen and curiously clicked on a video file, a brave move given the consequences if anyone had caught him prying.</p> <p>The footage was unsteady at first, before it closed in on a freshly dug pit in the ground between the bullet-pocked shells of two buildings. An intelligence officer he knew was knelt near the hole's edge in military fatigues and a fishing hat, brandishing an assault rifle and barking orders.</p> <p>The rookie militiaman froze in horror as the scene unfolded: a blindfolded man was led by the elbow and told to run towards the giant hole that he did not know lay in front of him. Nor did he anticipate the thud of bullets into his flailing body as he tumbled on to a pile of dead men beneath him. One by one, more unsuspecting detainees followed; some were told they were running from a nearby sniper, others were mocked and abused in their last moments of life. Many seemed to believe their killers were somehow leading them to safety.</p> <p>When the killing was done, at least 41 men lay dead in the mass grave in the Damascus suburb of Tadamon, a battlefield at the time in the conflict between the Syrian leader and insurrectionists lined up against him. Alongside piled heaps of dirt that would soon be used to finish the job, the killers poured fuel on the remains and ignited them, laughing as they literally covered up a war crime just several miles from Syria's seat of power. The video was date-stamped 16 April 2013.</p> <p>A paralysing nausea took hold of the recruit, who instantly decided the footage needed to be seen elsewhere. That decision has led him, three years later, on a perilous journey from one of the darkest</p>

moments of Syria's recent history to the relative safety of Europe. It has also united him with a pair of academics who have spent years trying to get him – the prime source in an extraordinary investigation – to safety while identifying the man who directed the massacre and persuading him to admit his role.

It is the story of a war crime, captured in real time, by one of the Syrian regime's most notorious enforcers, branch 227 of the country's military intelligence service that also details the painstaking efforts to turn the tables on its perpetrators – including how two researchers in Amsterdam duped one of the most infamous security officers in Syria through an online alter ego and seduced him into spilling the sinister secrets of Assad's war.

Their work has cast an unprecedented light on crimes previously believed to have been widely committed by the regime at the height of the Syrian war but always denied or blamed on rebel groups and jihadists.

Nine years later, as war rages in Ukraine, a playbook of state terror on civilian populations rehearsed in Syria is being redeployed by Russian forces, as Vladimir Putin's so-called special military operation turns into a brutal occupation of parts of the east of the country. Military intelligence units there have been at the forefront of savagery, instilling fear into communities through mass detentions and killings of the type that characterised Assad's brutal attempts to claw back power.

Trained by Soviet and Stasi officers in the 1960s, Syria's security agencies learned well the art of intimidation. Often, the allegiance of those snatched at checkpoints was of little consequence; fear was the regime's most lethal means to cling to power and it used every means available to instil it. In this case, the victims were not insurrectionists but civilians who were unaligned to either side and had accepted Assad's protection. Their murders were widely seen in Tadamon as a message to the whole suburb: "Don't even consider opposing us."

In leaking the video, first to an opposition activist in France, and then to the researchers, Annsar Shahhoud and Prof Uğur Ümit Üngör, from the University of Amsterdam's Holocaust and Genocide Center, the source had to overcome the fear of being caught and probably killed and the distress of potentially being cast out from his family – prominent members of Assad's Alawite sect, which holds the main levers of power in what remains of Syria.

He would eventually learn that even as hundreds of people around the world worked to bring Assad to justice for war crimes, the video would end up being a standout piece of evidence in the case against the Syrian leader.

But first, Annsar and Uğur needed to find the man in the fishing hat, and they turned to the only thing they believed could help: an alter ego.

'Anna Sh'

Annsar had been a vocal critic of Assad since the outbreak of the Syrian war. Her family were members of a community that had largely retained good relations with Assad, but the conflict and the ensuing economic collapse strained alliances and Annsar increasingly found herself determined to hold Assad to account, no matter the personal price.

She moved to Beirut in 2013 and then to Amsterdam two years later, where she met Uğur in 2016. Both shared a drive to chronicle what they believed to be a genocide being committed in Syria. Piecing together the stories of survivors and their families was one way to do it. Speaking to the perpetrators themselves was another. Breaking the omertà code of the regime, however, was a task thought nearly impossible. But Annsar had a plan: she decided to turn to the internet, and find her way into the inner sanctum of the regime's security officials by pretending to be a fangirl who had fully embraced their cause.

"The problem was that the Assad regime is very difficult to study. You don't just walk into Damascus, waving your arms, saying well, 'Hey, I'm a sociologist from Amsterdam and I would like to ask some questions,'" said Uğur, in the grand dark wood drawing room of the Holocaust and Genocide Centre. "We

came to the conclusion that, actually, we need a character – and that character should be a young Alawite woman.”

Annsar established that Syria’s spies and military officers tended to use Facebook, and despite their secretive work lives, they tended not to make their social media settings private. She decided on an alias, “Anna Sh”, and asked a photographer friend to shoot an alluring glimpse of her face. She then turned her homepage into a glowing tribute to Assad and his family and set about trying to recruit friends.

Day and night for the next two years, she scoured Facebook looking for likely suspects. When she found a taker, she told them she was a researcher studying the Syrian regime for her thesis. Eventually, she got good at it. She learned the regime mood of the time and, together with Uğur, tailored jokes and talking points that might help with an approach. Soon, Anna Sh became known among the security services as an understanding figure – and even a shoulder to cry on.

“They needed to talk to someone, they needed to share their experience,” she said. “We shared some stories with them. We listened to all the stories, not focusing only on their crimes.”

“Some of these people got attached to Anna,” Uğur continued. “And some of them started calling in the middle of the night.”

Over the next two years, Annsar lived and breathed her new persona. At times she recoiled from who she had become – someone who had got into the minds of her prey and could at times understand them on a raw human level that eclipsed the clinical boundaries of her research.

But the snap back to reality was usually sudden. Many of those she had spoken to had been active parts of a killing machine, others were willing parts of the cabal that enabled them. Her health took a toll, as did her social life and her sanity. The prize was worth it, however. If she could find the gunman in the video, she could start to bring justice to the families of those he killed. And, maybe, she could start what few others had managed in the decade-long conflict: begin a process that irrefutably linked the Syrian state to some of the war’s worst atrocities.

In March 2021, the breakthrough finally arrived. Anna Sh’s Facebook following had by then won the confidence of more than 500 of the regime’s most devoted officials. Among her trawls of their friends and photos, a distinctive moon face with a scar and facial hair stood out. He called himself Amgd Youssuf, and he looked very much like the gunman in the fishing hat that she had exhausted herself looking for. Soon afterwards, Annsar, or Anna Sh – by now it had become difficult to distinguish the two – received corroboration from a source inside Tadamon that the killer was a major in branch 227 of the Syrian military intelligence service.

“The relief was indescribable,” she said. “Here was someone who held the key to it all. And now I needed to make him talk.”

Annsar remembers well the moment she hit send on her friend request, and the excitement she felt when her prey accepted. After all this time, the bait had been set. Now she needed to reel him in. The first call was fleeting; Amjad was suspicious and ended the call quickly. But something in that initial conversation had whetted his curiosity. The hunter had become the hunted. Was it the thrill of talking to a strange woman, the need to interrogate someone who dared to approach him, or something else? Either way, when Amjad video-called three months later, Annsar pressed record, and “Anna” answered the call.

After all these years, there he was; stern at first, very much in character as a spy who controlled all his conversations and readily deployed stony silence as a weapon. He uttered few words, and when he did speak he mumbled, forcing his listener to strain to hear him. Anna Sh did all she could to disarm Amjad, grinning sheepishly, giggling and deferring to him as he peppered her with questions, all delivered on his terms. Gradually his frozen face begins to relax, and Anna won the floor. She asked him about Tadamon.

And then she asked a question that changed the tone of the whole conversation: “What it was like to go hungry, not to sleep, to fight, to kill – to fear for your parents, for your people. It’s a huge responsibility – you carried a lot on your shoulders.”

Amjad sat back in his chair, as if to acknowledge that somebody had finally understood his burden. From then on, he was in the interrogation seat. The conversation was no longer his. Anna had an answer for every one of his replies; building him up, putting him at ease and puffing his ego. Much like Jennifer Melfi was to Tony Soprano, she had become to him a therapist, a sounding board, a trusted woman that could get to know his mind without, it would seem, passing judgment.

“I don’t deny that I was excited talking to him,” said Annsar. “So I was smiling. Because wow, you’re talking to him. But to know their stories, we need to convince them that we are just researchers. So they open up. It’s not a result of one interview – it’s a result of four years undercover. Gradually, I learned to dissociate myself. I created this girl who is really admiring their deeds. It’s tough. After you close the laptop, you feel like it’s heavy stuff, but it’s needed. And I wanted to see him as a human.”

Throughout the summer of last year, Annsar and her alter ego, with Uğur often sitting just off screen, tried to persuade Amjad to talk. Getting inside the head of a killer was one thing, but gathering real information about why he did and extracting admissions was another. They trawled his Facebook profile for clues, and came across a photo of a younger brother, and poems Amjad had written after his death in early 2013, three months before the Tadamon massacre. Anna kept pestering him for another call, but he remained elusive. Then late one night in June, her Facebook messenger lit up. It was Amjad. Here was her chance to nail him down.

‘I killed a lot’

Amjad was more relaxed this time, dressed in a singlet with perhaps a drink or two on board. The floor was now his, or so he thought, and he began with small talk, trying to feel Anna out. She seized her moment and asked about his brother, and the feared killer and enforcer started to weep. Anna switched to Melfi mode as he told her he had to stay in the military despite the risk of his mother being forced to grieve another son. “You did what you needed to do,” he said.

And then came Amjad’s first real admission. “I killed a lot,” he said. “I took revenge.”

As if to recognise the gravity of the moment, Amjad shut down the conversation and ended the call. Over the next few months he was difficult to find, responding only on chats and asking when Anna was returning to Syria. Who was this woman who had gotten under his skin? When would he get the chance to interrogate her on his own turf and terms?

Amjad started to play the role of the jealous boyfriend, asking who Anna was with, whether she drank and where she was.

Annsar, meanwhile, was starting to feel that her alter ego had reached the limit of her powers, and that Anna Sh needed a rest, just as she did. The character had spoken to up to 200 regime officials, some of them direct perpetrators in murders, and others part of a community that had aided and abetted Assad’s increasingly brutal attempts to cling on to power. They had started to speak among themselves about the mystery woman in all of their inboxes.

Late last year, after Annsar had spoken to a woman who accused Amjad of assaulting her, she had had enough. All this empathising with perpetrators had started to seep into her soul. So, too, was living a character.

“Annsar also deserves to live,” she said. “And then the question was, where is Annsar? Who is Annsar now? Lost in the research? Anna was able to pretend in life and as an Alawite, pretend for hours here in Amsterdam. And I think Anna went so far, it’s not only a digital identity. Where is the original person in all of this? Where is Annsar? So I decided to execute Anna.”

On a cold morning in January this year, Uğur and Annsar packed a small box with a printout of Anna's Facebook profile, a sword used as a symbol by the Assad regime and some trinkets and drove to a nature reserve outside Amsterdam. There, they dug a hole and buried the character, with a startled dog walker the only other person to bear witness to the demise of a digital sleuth whose body of work would have made any real spy proud.

"I mean psychologists and therapists will tell you that if you have a particularly difficult period, you can mark that period with a ritual," said Uğur. "So ritualising something actually helps you put it behind you. I thought, actually, good riddance."

It was time for the two researchers to start focusing on the material they had collected and had not been able to process while so deeply immersed in the character they had just buried in a forest with a minute's silence

"I laugh about her all the time," reflected Annsar. "We always remember Anna."

But there was one more thing they needed to do; confront Amjad with what they knew about him.

"Because how long do you want to go on courting a mukhabarat [intelligence] officer," asked Uğur. "I think that the moment where he opened up about his brother, and that he committed revenge, that's as close as you can get in this particular context."

Over Facebook messenger, Annsar, using her real identity this time rather than "Anna", sent Amjad a 14 second sequence of video.

"His first question was: 'Is that me in the video?' I said: 'Yes it's you.' He said: 'Yeah, it's me. But what does this video tell? Nothing. I'm arresting someone, and that's my job.'"

Realising the consequences of what he had just been shown, Amjad then railed against members of the National Defence Front, the militia that the rookie who had leaked the video had belonged to. He described them as thugs and killers and said he was not like them.

Then the subterfuge stopped, and Amjad defiantly embraced what he had done. "I'm proud of what I did", he wrote in a message, before threatening to kill her and her family.

Neither Annsar nor Uğur have responded to Amjad since February and have blocked him from their social media accounts. However, he has tried to reach out several times. He is clearly nervous about what lies ahead, as well he may be. War crimes prosecutions in Germany have started to break the armour of impunity that has shrouded the Assad regime in Syria. Yet those court hearings do not contain the same overwhelming evidence as depicted in the Tadamon massacre video.

Before this story could be told, however, one man needed to get to safety – the person who had leaked the video to a friend in France, and then to Uğur and Annsar. Some time in the last six months, he started his dangerous journey.

The source's escape

Leaving the regime in Syria is never easy. Anyone hoping to travel to other parts of the country, or especially abroad, faces a long process of questioning before being allowed to do so. Although Assad retains power, the area he controls has shrunk, and two powerful overlords, Iran and Russia, have veto over many state decisions. Opposition groups retain control of the north-west, and the Kurds have aegis in the north-east. Syria remains broken and unreconciled; a place where even family members can be suspected of being traitors in waiting.

And that is how it was when a young man set off from the Syrian capital for Aleppo in the past six months on the first leg of a journey that would take him to the opposition-held north, then to Turkey and onwards to Europe.

The drive to Aleppo was a nervous one. He had been allowed to leave, but would the dreaded intelligence units catch up with him before he made it beyond their clutches? On Aleppo's northern outskirts, a colonel from the 4th division of the Syrian army pocketed a \$1,500 (£1,187) bribe in return for allowing the man across the no man's land separating both sides. The journey was delayed a day, as a Captagon shipment was readied by the 4th division to cross the same route. Shortly after, a truck carrying dozens of kilos of the stimulant, made and distributed by the regime and exported across the Middle East, made its way to the opposition-held north.

The source soon followed. Several weeks later, Annsar met him in Turkey, where gaps in the story of Tadamon were filled in over weeks of discussions, and notes for a war crimes prosecution steadily put in order.

In February, Uğur and Annsar handed over the videos and their notes, comprising thousands of hours of interviews, to prosecutors in the Netherlands, Germany and France. In the same month in Germany, came the first ever prosecution of another Syrian military intelligence official, Anwar Raslan, for his role in overseeing the murder of at least 27 prisoners and torture of at least 4,000 others. He was convicted of crimes against humanity and has been imprisoned for life.

Annsar remains estranged from her family and in her words, is not the same person she was before she started this project. "But it was worth it," she said. "It was exhausting, but I hope our work will help bring justice."

Tadamon these days is a bustling part of the capital that looks like war never darkened its doorsteps. Much of the damage and the atrocities have been covered over by buildings, carparks, or piles of the flotsam and jetsam of conflict. Annsar and Uğur remain convinced that many more massacres took place there and have been piecing together locations and the names of those who went missing in the savage tussle for control of the suburb.

"The locals blame the regime," said Uğur. "They know who killed their loved ones. The strange thing is that the people who were killed in this video were not dissidents, they were onside with the regime. You can see they are not malnourished. They are straight from checkpoints, not dungeons. They were killed as a warning not to consider crossing sides. Their families deserve justice."

The source, meanwhile, is safe outside Syria. In fleeing his surroundings – the innermost circle of the Assad regime – he has condemned himself to a life of exile. "He is happy with his decision," said Annsar. "Sometimes people just want to do the right thing. If I've learned anything out of this, it's that there's good in people. That truth can still eventually see the light."

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HEADLINE	04/25 Islamophobic incidents hit 27yr-high in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/25/muslim-advocacy-group-says-islamophobic-incidents/
GIST	<p>Reports of Anti-Muslim or Islamophobic incidents were up 9% last year over 2020 figures to a 27-year high of 6,720 cases, according to an annual report released Monday by the Council on American-Islamic Relations.</p> <p>CAIR cofounder and executive director Nihad Awad told a news conference that the District-based advocacy group's report, titled "Still Suspect: The Impact of Structural Islamophobia," indicates that "Islamophobia has become mainstream in America. It made its way into the government institutions and public sphere through laws, policies, political rhetoric and other manifestations."</p> <p>Mr. Awad said the 2021 total represents "the highest number of cases reported to CAIR in 27 years," adding, "this milestone is alarming."</p> <p>Huzaifa Shahbaz, the group's senior researcher, said there were 2,823 complaints on immigration and travel-related issues, the most common report received for the second year in a row.</p>

One of CAIR's chief targets is the federal watchlist of suspected terrorists.

Robert McCaw, the group's government affairs director, said the rules for the list should be changed to preclude the inclusion of "innocent people, people who have not been arrested, charged or convicted on terrorism-related offenses from being listed."

The group also wants to stop federal officials from sharing watchlist data with "foreign governments, private individuals and corporations and state police officers."

Attorney Justin Sadowski of the CAIR Legal Defense Fund has filed lawsuits in Virginia, the District, Maryland, Texas, and Oregon challenging the constitutionality of the watchlist as well as the "religious questioning that the government will sometimes ask ... at the border. We are challenging its effects on banking and on the ability to own and possess a gun."

He added, "Congress has never authorized the watchlist. This is something that the Department of Justice and other government entities did on their own, based on an executive order in the fear and chaos after 9/11."

The group also is pushing back against legislation blocking government contracts for those who advocate for boycotts, divestment and sanctions targeting Israel. He said such rules unconstitutionally punish "political speech in support of Palestine."

The group said its report, available at www.cair.com, "catalogs a list of anti-Muslim incidents ... ranging from hate crimes/bias incidents, forcible removal of hijabs, employment discrimination, mosque vandalisms, school bullying and intimidation."

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HEADLINE	04/26 'Catch me if you can' child rapist jailed
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/king-county-man-sentenced-to-10-years-to-life-for-child-rape-of-niece
GIST	<p>ALGONA, Wash. - A man who taunted deputies on Facebook to "catch me if you can" while on the run has been sentenced to 10 years to life in prison for child rape.</p> <p>Then 35-year-old Allan Clarke was wanted by the King County Sheriff's Office in 2018 after his niece, Beckah Luna, came forward saying he had been molesting her for years.</p> <p>FOX 13 does not name victims of sexual assault unless they come forward to share their stories. Luna came forward in 2013 to get justice and has been advocating for Clarke's capture since he was on the loose.</p> <p>Luna said the abuse began when she was 11 years old at the hands of her uncle, Clarke. When she was 17, she became pregnant and went to police for the first time in 2013.</p> <p>The investigation stalled when Luna had second thoughts.</p> <p>"I just say it was the shame really and embarrassment that was just crippling," she told FOX 13 in December 2018. "It kept me down."</p> <p>Clarke was arrested in Manitowac, Wisconsin and transported back to King County. He was featured on Washington's Most Wanted and was capture #1,041 thanks to tips from viewers.</p> <p>On April 22, Clarke was sentenced to 10 years to life for second- and third-degree child rape charges. He was also sentenced for communication with a minor for immoral purposes, which is a misdemeanor.</p> <p>At the time of his arrest in 2018, he was an eight-time convicted felon.</p>

	<p>In a statement on Clarke's sentencing, Luna said: <i>"Above all, I want my story to glorify the importance of stepping into your power and overcoming shame. When you know that something is wrong, and nobody listens, it's okay to be loud! It's okay to take up space. It's okay to demand to be heard. No matter how inconvenient it may be for everyone else. Validation of your pain and horror makes room for recovery, and that is what this journey to justice has given me. I feel so empowered.</i></p> <p><i>So for every person in this world with long-kept secrets... buried pain. I want you to know that you matter. It's never too late to allow healing to begin. Fear and shame don't win, when the spotlights are turned on and evil can't hide anymore. No matter how big or small your story may seem. No matter how unimportant people may have made you feel. There are those who do care. You're not invisible. I see you."</i></p> <p>Clarke must also register as a sex offender and get a sexual deviancy evaluation, according to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.</p> <p>He is also forbidden from having any contact with Luna or her child for his lifetime.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Renton PD: scammer impersonates officer
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/renton-police-warn-of-a-scammer-impersonating-an-officer
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. - Police are warning the public of a phone call scam circulating the area where the caller impersonates an officer and asks for money.</p> <p>According to The Renton Police Department (RPD), they have received reports of a caller identifying themselves as Sgt. Rutledge. The caller provides a badge number and caller ID shows up as Renton Police Department. RPD says they do have a Cmdr. Rutledge working for the department, but this is a scam. RPD will not call about warrants, missing jury duty or not paying tickets.</p> <p>Authorities say the man on the other end of the phone told a potential victim she had two warrants for missing jury duty, and said she could have them dismissed if she paid \$750 for each one. The man then said payments could be made through Apple Pay, Zelle or Venmo. The caller even transferred her to another man who tried to convince her to pay.</p> <p>Fortunately, she became suspicious and texted her brother who knew a police officer to ask. The officer responded saying it was in fact a scam, and she hung up.</p> <p>Authorities are asking the public to stay vigilant and if anyone receives one of these calls, hang up. Do not give them any information or pay them anything.</p> <p>Anyone who is skeptical on the validity of these phone calls can always call the RPD or call the courts to verify at 425-430-7500.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Arrest: Pasco student wrote school 'hit list'
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/delta-high-school-student-arrested-for-alleged-hit-list-of-20-classmates
GIST	<p>PASCO, Wash. — A Delta High School student is facing a felony charge for allegedly writing a "hit list" of 20 classmates in her journal.</p> <p>According to court documents, the 14-year-old student allegedly wrote on one name, "Offenses...Method of Murder...Hurt my feelings...Stab 8 times in the chest."</p> <p>Court documents state another student had seen the alleged "hit list" and reported it to the school administration.</p>

	<p>The documents go on to state school administration staff found the journal in the student's backpack on March 31 and questioned her.</p> <p>Pasco Police arrested the student on April 4 for 1 count of suspicion of harassment - felony threats to kill.</p> <p>Police said she was booked into the Juvenile Justice Center.</p> <p>Police said the student has since then been released and has been expelled from Delta High School. In a statement, the Pasco School District (PSD) said the families of any impacted students were notified and there is no credible threat to students at this time.</p> <p>The Pasco School District released the following statement: <i>The safety of students within the Pasco School District (PSD) is our top priority and something we take very seriously. When Delta High School administrators were alerted to a student making alleged threats against other students, they took immediate action by contacting the Pasco Police Department (PD) and completing a full threat assessment. The families of any impacted students were also notified. The Pasco PD completed their investigation, which was referred to the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office for review. While PSD does not disclose disciplinary actions for individual students, the student is not attending school on the Delta campus and there is no credible threat to students at this time.</i></p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Violent attacker 'incompetent' to stand trial
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/man-accused-of-two-violent-unprovoked-attacks-deemed-incompetent-to-stand-trial
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The man accused on two random and unprovoked attacks on women just 30 minutes apart, has been found 'incompetent' to stand trial Tuesday.</p> <p>Alexander Jay,40, was found incompetent to stand trial, and ordered to get restoration treatment.</p> <p>That means he must stay in a mental facility like Western State for three months, until he convinces experts, he understands the charges against him.</p> <p>King County prosecutors said they will not drop the assault charges he faces.</p> <p>"It's our intention for us him to be held accountable to get justice for the victim, just like we did in the last case with this individual," said Casey McNerthney with the King County Prosecutor's Office. "We are not dropping these felony cases. We expect the felony cases to proceed."</p> <p>The March 2 attacks were brutal and disturbing.</p> <p>Jay is accused of randomly shoving a woman down the light rail stairs—then beating her.</p> <p>Thirty minutes later, prosecutors said Jay is seen on Metro bus video stabbing a woman 10 times.</p> <p>KOMO is also learning; Jay we're now learning he went through this process before in a 2020 residential burglary case where he was convicted of smashing into an 89-year-old grandmother's house.</p> <p>Her neighbors Gary and Melissa intervened by holding Jay at gunpoint until police arrived, after the grandmother frantically called them.</p> <p>"It is awful because I know what he is capable of -it was put in our faces," said Good Samaritan neighbor Melissa. "It could have been so much worse."</p>

	<p>“He was prone to violence, the guy needed to be arrested, I wasn’t going to let him go,” said Good Samaritan neighbor Gary.</p> <p>Court documents show in the burglary case restoration evaluation, a psychologist wrote “Mr. Jay’s risk for both future dangerousness and re-offending would significantly increase should he engage in substance use or discontinue psychotropic medication.”</p> <p>Jay served his time in line with state sentencing guidelines, but two weeks after he got out of jail—he was accused in the violent attacks against the two women.</p> <p>“He can’t come out,” Melissa said.</p> <p>“Whether or not he gets treatment in jail so be it, but he deserves to stay in jail,” Gary said.</p> <p>Some may wonder why prosecutors do something to keep Jay on medication.</p> <p>Prosecutors say they cannot get an involuntary medication order in a criminal case after someone has served their time and is out of custody.</p> <p>Jay is expected back in court after the restoration process in August.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle drops prosecution 2,000 old cases
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/city-attorney-dropping-nearly-2000-old-cases-cites-priorities/NRAU6BW5HFA75BQ3XOGCUN7VNE/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The owner of a Belltown business hit for the fourth time says he is forced to take matters into his own hands to stay safe.</p> <p>This comes as the city’s top prosecutor says she will drop nearly 2,000 similar cases that have accumulated over the last two years.</p> <p>Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison signaled last week that she planned to drop the cases because, she says, many are too old to pursue.</p> <p>But that’s an about-face from her 2021 campaign to be tough on all lawbreakers.</p> <p>Now, this Belltown business owner says drug dealers do more to keep his business safe than the police.</p> <p>In fact, when this window was broken out Sunday, he got the word not from Seattle police, but from the drug dealers who agreed to watch out for him.</p> <p>They said they would as long as he doesn’t call the police on them.</p> <p>When someone smashed a window at Club Dogfish Sunday night, it was the fourth time someone had broken into this dog-sitting business since it opened Jan. 28.</p> <p>The surveillance video shows Seattle police arriving 17 minutes later.</p> <p>“This was the first time in the four break-ins, I actually spoke to a police officer, so,” said owner Josh Center.</p> <p>What did they tell him? “They told me to install all new cameras,” he recalled. “My cameras were stolen on the first break-in. So I didn’t have cameras this time.”</p>

What Center has done instead is to enlist the help of the drug dealers and others, he says, who hang out outside his business in the heart of Belltown.

“I feel like we’re returning to the era of protection money,” said Center. “Because in exchange for me turning my eye when I have drug dealers at my door or down the block, they keep people from hanging out at my building.”

Indeed he says they were the ones who told him about Sunday’s break-in.

“A backup of this size is shameful,” Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison told the City Council’s public safety committee Tuesday.

She says nearly 2,000 cases like this that have been allowed to languish for the last two years won’t be prosecuted.

“The longer a case sits unattended,” said Davison, “the harder it is to prosecute.”

Those cases include theft, criminal trespass, property destruction, non-DUI traffic violations, and another 400 cases that are past the statute of limitations.

Davison says the priority will be crimes against persons, where a firearm is used, DUIs and suspects with three or more cases.

“I want to reinforce we are making this decision because it is the only way we can begin to return real-time accountability to our misdemeanor criminal justice system,” said Davison.

She insists crimes like this — those that are happening now — will be pursued, just as she promised.

That won’t help in this case.

No one has been arrested for any of the vandalism that has happened here.

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HEADLINE	04/26 Tacoma arrest: multiple armed robberies
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260787277.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma police on Tuesday arrested a 31-year-old man wanted for investigation of two armed robberies in the city. Police said they are looking into his involvement in more than a dozen other robberies.</p> <p>The man was arrested following an early morning hit-and-run collision in the 700 block of Tacoma Avenue, according to a tweet from Tacoma Police Department. Police did not disclose details of that incident.</p> <p>Officers recognized the man as a suspect wanted for robberies in Tacoma while arresting him for the hit and run at about 3:05 a.m., police said in a news release.</p> <p>Police booked the man into Pierce County Jail on suspicion of two counts of first-degree robbery.</p> <p>Officers had probable cause to arrest the man for an armed robbery that occurred April 13 at a Walgreens at 4315 6th Avenue. The other robbery he is a suspect in occurred March 3 at an Ace Hardware at 2012 S. 12th St.</p> <p>Police said the suspect robbed both stores at gunpoint.</p> <p>Reports of armed robberies have been on the rise so far this year in Tacoma. According to a citywide weekly briefing breaking down crime stats in the city, Tacoma experienced a 135 percent increase in robberies from Jan. 1 to April 10 compared to the same time period last year.</p>

	According to the briefing, 287 robberies were reported in that time period this year. Last year, 122 robberies had been reported.
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HEADLINE	04/26 Federal takeover NYC Rikers jail complex?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/federal-takeover-considered-rikers-jail-complex/story?id=84315850
GIST	<p>After years of failed attempts to reform Rikers Island, a federal judge in Manhattan on Tuesday will consider whether to put New York City's sprawling and troubled jail complex under control of the court.</p> <p>Judge Laura Taylor Swain in 2014 appointed a federal monitor, but Rikers, part of the New York City Department of Correction, remains plagued by staffing problems, physical deterioration and violence. The court monitor, Steve Martin, said Tuesday that there is time to make changes to Rikers Island and gave the city three weeks to submit a plan to avert a federal takeover of the troubled jail.</p> <p>More extreme measures may be necessary, Martin advised.</p> <p>Anna Friedberg, Martin's deputy, cited multiple instances when legal barriers -- including city policies, existing contracts and union rules -- have stymied city reforms.</p> <p>The city must cut that red tape immediately and take dramatic action, including hiring outside expertise, and must allow them to work from home, Friedberg said.</p> <p>Friedberg also cited four areas of concern at Rikers: security, staffing, management of incarcerated people and accountability. The city has until 3 p.m. on May 17 to submit its plan, and a hearing will be held on May 24.</p> <p>Prior to the judgment, the administration of New York City Mayor Eric Adams, in its own letter to the court, insisted it is making progress and asked for more time.</p> <p>"The extraordinary measure of ordering a receivership is not merited and DOJ's reference to it, less than four months into Commissioner Molina's term, is unfair," said Kimberly Joyce of the New York City Law Department. "The commissioner has taken more far-reaching action than has previously been demonstrated."</p> <p>A lawyer for the city said Tuesday that they are "in general agreement with the monitoring team" on changes. Part of that plan includes the hiring of 578 new correction officers, which the mayor revealed earlier Tuesday.</p> <p>Fifteen inmates died in custody last year, and three have died so far in 2022. There were more than five dozen stabbings in March alone.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorneys office admitted it is giving "serious consideration" to seeking federal receivership of New York City jails to address the "ongoing, daily constitutional injury to the inmates."</p> <p>Damien Williams, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, expressed alarm at the level of violence. He raised the possibility of federal receivership to force change.</p> <p>"The jails are in a state of crisis, inmates and staff are being seriously injured, and action is desperately needed now," Williams said in a letter to the court. "Based on our experience over the last six years and the sustained non-compliance with key Consent Judgment provisions and the three subsequent Remedial Orders entered by this Court, our Office is very concerned about whether the Department and City have the ability, expertise, and will to swiftly make the changes necessary to bring true reform to this deeply troubled agency."</p>

	<p>Swain has ordered Correction Commissioner Louis Molina to attend the hearing, marking the first time all the stakeholders will convene since the possibility of a federal takeover was raised.</p> <p>Molina said reforms are already in the works, adding that he believes the former administration of Bill de Blasio was pursuing a "political argument" to close Rikers.</p> <p>"I am in total agreement with the monitor's recommendations," Molina said. "My vision is to create a culture of discipline and service to those incarcerated."</p> <p>The Legal Aid Society said in a statement Tuesday that the city has not yet demonstrated the "capacity to respond to this humanitarian crisis."</p> <p>"The ongoing violence and harm that New Yorkers suffer on Rikers Island, and the demonstrated inability of the City to manage its jails safely and competently despite years of technical assistance from an expert monitoring team, cannot be solved through business as usual," the non-profit legal aid organization said. "... Independent leadership with authority and willingness to enact bold, swift change, such as may be obtained through receivership, is necessary to end this quagmire."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/26 Derek Chauvin seeks reversal of conviction
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/derek-chauvin-asks-court-overturn-conviction-george-floyds/story?id=84314521
GIST	<p>Attorneys for former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in a court filing Monday asked an appeals court to overturn his conviction in the killing of George Floyd.</p> <p>Chauvin's lawyers in the filing asked the court to do one of three things: reverse his conviction, reverse his conviction and grant him a new trial in a different venue, or return the case to a lower court for resentencing.</p> <p>In April 2021, Chauvin was found guilty in the death of Floyd on counts of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.</p> <p>He was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison last June.</p> <p>In a 72-page court filing, Chauvin's lawyers said that pretrial publicity, jurors' concerns for their safety, the potential for riots to break out if Chauvin was acquitted and physical threats to the courthouse prevented Chauvin from getting a fair trial.</p> <p>"The overwhelming media coverage exposed the jurors -- literally every day -- to news demonizing Chauvin and glorifying Floyd, which was more than sufficient to presume prejudice," the court filing said.</p> <p>The lawyers added, "However, the real problem is the jurors expressed concern for (i) they and their families' personal safety and (ii) riots breaking out in the event they acquitted Chauvin."</p> <p>The court filing argued that a change of venue, which was previously denied by the lower court, was necessary in this case.</p> <p>"There are few cases involving such violent threats by the community in the event the jury finds the defendant not guilty. Those cases -- which all involved defendant police officers -- required transfer of venue," the attorneys said in the filing.</p> <p>The threat of violence was "extreme," and because jurors were not sequestered, they saw this every day during trial, Chauvin's lawyers said in the filing.</p> <p>"The courthouse was surrounded by barbed wire and soldiers during the trial. Prior to jury deliberations, National Guard troops were deployed throughout Minneapolis, businesses boarded up their buildings and schools were closed 'bracing for a riot' in the event Chauvin's acquittal," the filing said.</p>

Lawyers for Chauvin also argued that his sentence should be reduced, as the presumptive sentence for someone without a criminal history is 150 months, while he received 270 months. They argued that "abuse of a position of authority" is not an aggravating factor that would allow for his upward sentencing.

Chauvin's lawyers also claimed that a police officer cannot be convicted for felony murder under Minnesota law and that Chauvin was authorized to "touch" Floyd when Floyd resisted arrest.

"Chauvin is a police officer statutorily authorized to commit 'assaults' to effect an arrest," they stated in the filing.

Later, the attorneys claimed that "in order for a police officer to be convicted of murder, Minnesota statutes require the officer to be using 'deadly force' -- force one knows will cause either death or 'great bodily harm.' Putting your knees on the back of a suspect does not create a 'substantial risk of causing, death or great bodily harm.'"

The court telling the jury that "it is not necessary for the State to prove that [Chauvin] intended to inflict substantial bodily harm" is a "material misstatement of the law," Chauvin's attorneys argued.

In the filing, the lawyers claimed this statement invited the jury to apply strict liability, a standard of liability that means the defendant could be responsible for the consequences of an action even in the absence of criminal intent.

Lawyers also claimed there was "prosecutorial misconduct," including discovery violations and failures to disclose, starting with the state "largely ignoring the Court's initial discovery deadline."

"The State's pervasive, intentional discovery violations, alone, were sufficiently prejudicial as to require a new trial," the filing stated.

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HEADLINE	04/25 Yelm American Legion cannon stolen
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/american-legion-cannon-stolen-in-yelm-vets-hope-for-safe-return
GIST	<p>YELM, Wash. - It's hand-forged and weighs 250 pounds, but neither the size nor weight of the recently stolen cannon that once sat in front of American Legion Post 164 is what makes it special.</p> <p>"It was the purpose," said Lucas Bruner, who works for the American Legion. "It provided our artillery veterans a little bit of support for them, for what they've done during their service. That's the part we're really grieving about."</p> <p>The cannon – which was only unveiled a few weeks ago – was a gift from the folks at Norse West Viking Festival. The cannon was made with proceeds from an event in 2020, and had been placed prominently near the front of the American Legion in Yelm as a memorial to veterans.</p> <p>Bruner said they've lost a number of veterans over the past few months, that cannon honored them.</p> <p>He's not sure why someone targeted them, but said they recently put on an Easter with several hundred people attending for a helicopter Easter egg drop. Bruner said it's possible the event drew attention to their newly unveiled cannon, but that members are intentionally connecting to the community – that the latest blow can't stop their work connecting with families and kids.</p> <p>"We want to be a family," explained Bruner. "Sometimes you have to open your heart – this time we got burned, but we'll grow from it."</p> <p>A police report was filed with the Yelm Police Department, but there's some hope that the thief – or thieves – will return the cannon.</p>

	"Bring it back. We don't judge. We'll sit down and make a burger, maybe have a drink with you. At the end of the day we just want you to bring it back, do the right thing."
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